FLAMING ARROW:
WWII as seen from a B-17

by

Edwin Maurice Braswell

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The memoirs of a Tail Gunner on a B-17 named "Flaming Arrow," who became a POW in Bucharest, Romania.

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(Jan. 2009 edition)

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I. PRELUDE – ABOUT WAR

War exudes an aura of glory. War engulfs the senses. War energizes the warrior. War empties the energy from the warrior. War produces many vivid emotions, but war has no glory.

Never become mesmerized and hypnotized by the perception of the glamour of war. The love of freedom and liberty is far different than the love of war. A romance with war is a romance of death and destruction. War is neither romantic nor glamorous.

Without a doubt the acceptance of the duty, responsibility and willingness to protect the fruits of freedom and liberty is a noble undertaking. It is an excursion down the path taken by countless persons who have cherished freedom and liberty above their own lives. It is a journey upon hallowed ground. But this march to freedom and liberty is not free; it only comes by paying the price.

The scars from the engagement with the enemy never fully heal. The scenes of the aftermath of battle are so indelibly etched on the mind that even decades of peace do not wipe them away. The storehouse of the mind overflows with thoughts of war that last a lifetime. The creeps remain forever.

Understanding war is difficult. From the perspective of the observer of war who is far from the actual battle and who is untainted by the fear of death or the reality of destruction, war is like a military parade. But the sound of the band at the military parade defies comparison to the sound of the bursting of an anti-aircraft shell which indiscriminately spews deadly flak. The bursting of that one shell is much more the reality of war than a thousand military parades.

I will always respond to the call of my country. I cherish liberty and I am proud to have fought to protect our glorious freedom. But even though these pages may make war seem to be as wonderful as a military parade, I know that the sounds and sights of war have no glory. Honor and safeguard freedom; hate war!

These pages contain personal memories of a time during World War II. They recall the preparation for service. They celebrate the camaraderie of the trained personnel who ventured into battle. They speak to the dedication of the people who paid the price for freedom and liberty. They lift up the glory of freedom. But these personal memories are written with the inwardly felt knowledge that the victory of war does not erase the pain of battle.

II. SHARING THE STORIES OF WAR

"Tell me about your memories of being a POW in World War II." It seems like an innocent invitation to talk. However, for years my response was to say "no," phrased in various ways. Certainly, everyone should know about World War II and it is commendable for persons to want to know more about it. World War II shaped the development of human civilization. But when the inquiry, or question, focuses on my memories, it is not a question about history nor is it a call for an analysis of the actions of governments and military leaders; it is a question that awakens the slumbering giant whom I try so hard to keep asleep, so I can sleep.

"Why don't you want to talk about your war experiences?" The memory of the experience is all too real. *"Being there"* again while answering questions means reliving the shakes and shivers, sounds of shot and shell, bombs and blasting, weapons and wounds, dying and death. Once the motion picture of the memories begins, it is hard to make the images of the screen fade away even though you cannot bear to look any more. The camera of the mind still retains a storehouse of the close calls with death, and of life desired to be forgotten.

War leaves stories of death written on books of stone whose chiseled words do not fade away with time. Buddies and close friends, long gone in the flesh arise from the field of death when the pages are read. But as surely as the memories of buddies and close friends arise they are struck down again by the lingering memory of the flash and clash of the never ending combat in which they fell.

These memories are written upon these pages to answer innocent questions from my family. These memories are written because even after sixty-three years since 1945, it is still too difficult to speak some of these words aloud. These memories are written in faint hope that it will ease the fear of the slumbering giant.

III. AN OVERVIEW

In my youth at age nineteen, I answered the call of my country. I volunteered for service in the United States Army Air Corps. I was assigned serial number 14180816.

My service of 35 months during World War II began on October 31, 1942, and terminated on September 19, 1945. Between these dates, I fought a war. I flew in combat as a Tail Gunner on a B-17 "Flying Fortress." I parachuted from a burning airplane. I spent two months behind barbed wire in a Romanian Prisoner of War camp. I survived. I came back home.

Upon my return to the shores of America, I strained to catch a glimmer of the the symbol for which I had been fighting. From the deck of the French cargo ship, the Athos II, which had been converted to a troop ship in Naples, Italy, I gazed into a misty morning fog which hung over New York Harbor. Suddenly, in a brief ray of sunlight, I saw the Statute of Liberty! I was overcome with emotion. I knew I was safely home.

My war experiences began this way: I was working as a Radio Announcer and Engineer Third Class at Station WGTM in Wilson, N.C. Daily news fresh from the battlefields rumbled in my ears. Tales of the need for manpower constantly filled the airwaves. Most of my friends were either volunteering or drafted daily.

During September 1942, the news stories told of the dire need for radio control tower operators in the Army Air Corps. I thought I could do the job. I took a national competitive examination, passed a very difficult test, and volunteered. I had qualified to receive a special duty assignment to work in an airfield control tower. Strangely enough, from that day to this day, I have never so much as set foot on the inside of a control tower, military or civilian. Once I enlisted, the Army had other plans for one as healthy as me, who then had 20-15 vision.

Following basic training in Columbus, Mississippi, I was shipped off to Madison, Wisconsin, for Radio Mechanics schooling. In the midst of the course, all of us were given medical tests to determine if we were physically qualified to be on a flight crew. I passed and was assigned flight training status. After extensive schooling I eventually became a Tail Gunner on a B-17 Bomber and Chief Armorer for the crew. In that capacity I flew 41 combat missions into enemy territory.

Even though my rank was Staff Sergeant, because of the thoroughness of my training, I was chosen to fly one mission as a Bombardier in the role of an officer. Our

regular bombardier had been killed in action during a previous mission. As an officer replacement was unavailable, I was pressed into this duty for a mission to bomb the marshaling yards at Avignon, France. Those marshaling yards were then in the control of the Germans who were using the railroad assembly tracks for shipping supplies to the front. We made the run. I manipulated the required switches, followed the command from the lead ship in the squadron, and all bombs were released on target (And, no, we did not bomb the famous bridge of antiquity, known in the song as "Sur Le Pont D'Avignon." In fact, the ancient part was still standing, and upon which my wife, Ruth, and I did dance as tourists in the spring of 1988.)

IV. CHRONOLOGY OF CAMPS – STATESIDE

A lot happened in the States before I ever got to combat. Here is the chronology of dates and places.

It was October 29, 1942, when I left Wilson, North Carolina to enlist in the Army Air Corp at Seymour Johnson Field in Goldsboro. However, my official swearing in got delayed. After only 12 hours on post, I was shipped off by train to Camp Croft, Spartansburg, S.C., to an Induction Center. As the Center was so swamped with paper work from a overflow influx of volunteers, my taking the oath of enlistment was delayed until October 31, 1942. To assist the camp staff in clearing up their backlog of office work I agreed to do clerical office work for several days. Back then, I could type 65 words a minute, learned in high school.

On November 6, 1942, I arrived by troop train at Fort Bragg, N.C. The next day I was issued my first uniform; allegedly, Camp Croft had run out of their supply. This was the first of three times that I was assigned to Fort Bragg, and each time was short. Along with the other recruits, we stayed in the Induction Center near the original traffic circle on base. The center was later torn down, to be replaced by a commissary and post exchange.

On November 10, 1942, after having had several days of basic processing and testing, some 40 of us were put on a troop train at the railroad marshaling yard on post at Fort Bragg and sent to McKoy Field at Columbus, Mississippi. I remember the train entering Fayetteville, some 10 miles away, by going on tracks down the edge of Bragg Boulevard, down Skibo Road, and on into the Aberdeen and Rockfish Railroad Yard on

Russell Street, and then hooking up with the main line of the Atlantic Coast Line Railroad a few blocks away. As I passed along the route through Fayetteville, N.C., I never thought in my most far out dreaming that one day I would be living in Fayetteville and calling it home. Anyway, the journey continued – first through Atlanta, and then southwest through Birmingham, Alabama and on to Mississippi.

In Columbus, Mississippi, at Mc Koy Field I was assigned to a twin engine flying training squadron, which was training new pilots. It was here that I received my basic training in the military. I was now a soldier in the Army Air Corp. One event in Columbus still looms large in memory, I have never seen as much food for a holiday celebration as the mess hall cooks served us on Thanksgiving Day in 1942.

January 10, 1943 found me traveling by train to a new assignment at Truax Army Air Field at Madison, Wisconsin. On arrival at Truax, I was a Private. A couple of months later, I received a promotion to Private First Class. My pay on enlistment was $21 a month. Fortunately, after one month, the U.S. Congress raised it to $30 per month. As a private first class, I made the grand sum of $55 per month. The pay scale for later promotions now escape my memory.

At Truax Field as one of the pieces of my uniform, as it also had been back at Columbus, Miss., I was still wearing the blue jeans pants issued me originally at Fort Bragg, as an essential part of my uniform. Bragg had run out of my size and khaki color of army fatigues. My company commander at Truax just could not stand me being different in uniform in formation from all the others, so I was given a special trip to the supply sergeant to get properly outfitted for the air corps. Yes, even the military had occasional shortages in supplies in those days.

Since I had enlisted to become a radio control tower operator and had qualified by passing a stringent written examination, my orders at Truax were to attend a radio mechanics school of about 20 weeks duration. By the end of the first 13 weeks I had learned to make a complete radio receiver, as well as a transmitter, from the raw parts chosen from various items in storage bins. Before I could complete the course, a compulsory physical exam given to all the students showed that I was qualified for flying training status. There ended my training and opportunity to become a control tower operator. And so, I was shipped off to armory school.

The event of my arrival in Madison, Wisconsin, and assignment to radio

mechanics school, remains memorable. There was snow on the ground, with drifts up to the top of the parking meters in the city, all a new experience for me. It snowed from three to five times each week I was there, until April 3, 1943. I never saw the bare surface of the ground until a couple of days before departure. Every day we walked to our classes in the snow. On a day off from classes I experienced my first and only ice skating adventure at one of many rinks in the city.

On April 3, 1943, I left Madison and traveled by train down through Chicago and hooked up with a lot of other troops assigned to Lowery Field # 1 in Denver, Colorado. After only a couple of days there, my next orders told me to report to Buckley Field on the eastern outskirts of Denver, arriving April 7, 1943. I completed basic armory school at Buckley.

May 3, 1943, found me being transferred to Lowery Field # 2 at Denver for additional armory training. Armory schooling involved learning all there is to know about pistols, machine guns, and 20 mm cannons. We could assemble and disassemble 50 caliber machine guns blindfolded, and with gloves on, as preparation for combat. We were also taught about the mechanics of loading the big bombs in the bomb bay of an airplane. We had some practice shooting various weapons on the range.

My real flying training began on June 19, 1943, when I arrived at Kingman Army Air Field, in Kingman, Arizona for enrollment in aerial gunnery school. Here I had my first ride ever in an airplane–a twin engine trainer, converted in the waist area amidship to accommodate a top turret gun mount. At the end of one of our training sessions the pilot flew us over a portion of the Grand Canyon of Arizona. Upon graduation I was promoted to the rank of Sergeant.

During the course of our ground gunnery training at Kingman we were taken to a separate firing range that had a figure-eight dirt road, and with other variable curves and dips. We were put into the back end of a pickup truck, which had canvas covers so that one could only see out a limited portion of the back side. Also, we were given a 20 gauge shotgun and then had to fire at, and shoot down, a prescribed number of clay pigeon targets that would suddenly be sent flying in most any direction as the truck passed that point of launch, all the while traveling at varying speed. It was both a challenging and exciting time, for we were being tested in practice on what we had studied in class on how to locate and aim at a flying target from a moving position. I had

no trouble hitting the targets, for back then my eyesight was 20-15. This shooting was the most fun I ever had while doing any of my military training.

In early August 1943 my gunnery class was dispatched to Yucca, Arizona for a week of temporary duty in extensive aerial gunnery training. We flew every day in a two-seater AT-6 single engine training plane–just a pilot and a gunner. Our cockpit was open, with a post supporting a 50 cal. machine gun. From an open standing position we fired color painted bullets at a sleeve target being pulled by another AT-6. To pass this test of marksmanship, as I did, we had a set number of holes in the cloth target sleeve that had to bear our assigned color in order for us to graduate. This school separated the men from the boys in markmanship. Seat type parachutes were required to be worn.

Another train ride occurred on August 25, 1943, as I went to my new assignment at the Replacement Center at Salt Lake City, Utah. During my 10-day stay, I went with some of my buddies into the city and had a tour of the Mormon Tabernacle. We only saw the Temple as no tour of it was then allowed.

On September 5, 1943, at the Ephrata Army Air Base in Ephrata, Washington, I achieved the goal of becoming a member of a Combat Crew on a B-17 airplane with the job of Tail Gunner. This air base was a no-man's land out in the desert between Spokane and Seattle. The ever-blowing wind would create such dust storms that the air base commander had a sprayer outfitted on a truck that would go around the barracks area and the air field area spraying some type of oil coating on the ground that was thick enough to stop the dust blowing (which dust would sometime clog up the engines on the B-17s). My first ride in a B-17 occurred here.

My original combat crew was formed in Ephrata. Our Pilot was 2nd Lt. Robert Maslow of New York City. Our crew of ten stayed together for all the rest of our flight training until leaving the States for overseas assignment. We bonded both as friends and flyers.

It was at Ephrata that I first met Homer J. Wilkins of Yukon, Oklahoma. Homer was assigned as our air crew chief mechanic and top turret gunner, with the rank of Staff/Sgt., later becoming a Tech/Sgt. He became my best friend throughout all my military service, and he currently lives at Garvin, Oklahoma, with his wife Macle (who, like my wife, was a Registered Nurse). He was the best of the best in performing all his

military assignments. For his courage and bravery in combat, he won the Distinguished Flying Cross and Silver Star, along with many other awards.

Years after the war and Homer's retirement from the Air Force with the rank of Master Sergeant we were fortunate to have a long visit with both Homer and Macle in the late 1970's in Southport, N.C. They were on an extended tour from Oklahoma to Florida, and on up the eastern seaboard to Washington, D.C. By phone we made plans to meet where I was then holding court, Southport, N.C., as this was then my assigned district as a Judge of Superior Court. The reunion had me on cloud 9 and we just could not talk fast enough to catch up on all that had happened since that memorable day of July 9, 1944 when I bailed out with our burning B-17. Though we talked all the way through a big seafood dinner, our conversations lasted on into the wee hours of the night back in our motel rooms. It is from this meeting that Homer sent me several pictures of Foggia, Italy and our combat experiences. One of those pictures is of our B-17 on fire the very day I bailed out, which photo was taken by a combat photographer flying in another plane in formation in our squadron. *(See* photo in Appendix "F".)

Our next duty station stateside was in Rapid City, South Dakota, which was a large-scale B-17 flying training center with special emphasis on combat preparedness. From about September 1943 to January 1944 our crew flew all kinds of practice missions throughout the entire northwest. (*See* crew photo in flying gear, with members names and positions, in Appendix A.) When we left Rapid City we thought we were totally ready for aerial warfare. Lt. Maslow believed in every man knowing his own job thoroughly, and not only that, but that every man should be able to perform at least one other job function among the crew. Later in combat this thoroughness of training came in very handy, as when I was asked to fly one mission as a Bombardier. Maslow also gave us more ground training than most other crews received in how to make a parachute jump, such as jumping out of towers and landing. He said it might save your life someday, and he was right!

In early January 1944, having been pronounced well prepared for combat, we were shipped off to the air base at Omaha, Nebraska. This was to be our last stop, so we were told by the Colonel, before beginning a duty transfer to the Pacific Theater of War. And, we were told, we would be flying B-24 bombers. Since the major part of our

training had been on B-17s, we could hardly believe the news. While we had flown about three training flights in B-24s while in Rapid City, we did not feel at home in them. After just one night in Omaha, and to our relieved delight, we received countermanding orders. The change of orders, which destination was kept as a secret even from us, sent us by train to Langley Field at Hampton (next door to Newport News), Virginia. While going to Omaha confused all of the crews, months later we figured this must have been a higher command way of hoping to fool any enemy spies. It certainly had us confused.

Langley proved to be a government research center for NASA, and it was here that I first saw or heard of the National Air and Space Authority. This was the forerunner of the subsequent 1958 Act of Congress establishing NASA, called National Aeronautical and Space Administration, as we now know it today. In time, we were briefed on the then recent invention called "radar." At that year, radar was very secret.

A big part of the airborne radar equipment took up the entire right half of the radio operators room amidship, including the viewing screen and operators seat, with the rotating scanner part installed in the ball turret gunner's hole beneath the fuselage. Being thus equipped, such an airplane had no ball turret gunner. Upon the viewing screen blips displayed whenever other aircraft came into our air space. It gave a good advance warning of enemy fighter planes in our vicinity, and it could do some ground observations.

We stayed at Langley from early January to about the last week of February 1944. We flew a lot of training missions. It was at Langley that we received the orders for overseas assignment for our crew. We were told by the Colonel that we would all be sent to Europe.

Our crew thought we were going specifically to England, to join the 8th Air Force, and were so informed at briefing. But for some unknown reason the very next day, we were told that four of our crew members would go to England by boat and the other six, including me, would fly. Our long trained together crew was split up. We separated from our bombardier, two waist gunners, and the ball turret gunner at Langley. We were supposed to meet them again in England. It never happened.

While the four did go by boat to England, the other six of us flew a B-17 to Italy! This airplane was especially equipped with "secret" radar. We flew through South

America and on to Africa and Italy. And so, in the sense that Italy is in Europe, the orders for us to go to Europe were correct. We never saw those four crew men again.

When we of the remaining crew of six left Langley on our way overseas, we flew first to Warner Robbins Army Air Field near Macon, Georgia. On the way down, I was able to talk our Pilot into flying directly over my home town of Rocky Mount, N.C., and over Wilson, N.C., the residence of my future wife, Ruth. Both towns were on our same flight path south, and only 18 miles apart. We exchanged our old B-17 in Macon for a newer B-17, containing the newest and more sophisticated radar in existence. In that year of the war radar was a highly secret piece of equipment Here we gained a captain, specially trained in the aerial use of radar and our new equipment, who accompanied us all the way to Foggia, Italy.

As an aside, I recall that the Captain was so afraid of getting killed in combat that before he left the states he had his orders specially cut so as to guarantee that he would stay no longer than 6 months overseas. After only one or two mission with our crew, Group Headquarters had him reassigned to do flying training teaching others in the use of radar, as others planes so equipped were arriving without operators. Several months later, while walking the streets of Foggia , I chanced seeing the Captain, and learned in conversation he found he liked his work and our area in Italy so well that he got his orders changed to allow him 6 more months of duty in Italy. An amazing transformation in his fearing the unknown!

I can't recall now as to how long we stayed at Warner Robbins, but it was not more than one night. Warner Robbins had been expecting us, and everything was the red carpet "quickie" treatment. We may not have stayed over five hours. There was so much secretiveness about this particular radar-equipped airplane that a special armed guard provided security around the plane at each stopover. Even our own crew was not allowed to reenter our own plane without giving the guard a confidential password, changed daily, and received from the base headquarters. I reminisce that upon stopping in Marrakech, Morocco, the designation "H2X" was the assigned password, which so happened to be the code number of our radar, strangely enough.

V. OVERSEAS TO ITALY

The Air Base at West Palm Beach, Florida was our next, and final stop before heading overseas. This base, known as Morrison Field, served as the jumping off place for all air traffic flying the South Atlantic-Africa route to Europe. I think we were there three days the last week of February 1944. Having been told at the PX (Post Exchange, store) that candy bars would be a scarce commodity in Italy, we enlisted men of the crew bought some three boxes apiece of the good sweet stuff and stored in by our various crew position on the airplane. It did come in handy later on.

Shortly before midnight on the last day of February 1944, we took off from the states and headed for an unknown new adventure with an ultimate destination of combat with the enemy. We headed south over the Caribbean. I well remember the early morning flying over many of the islands in the West Indies, admiring the conglomerate of colors of the various depths of the ocean waters, and lush green foliage of the islands.

Our first stop on foreign soil was on the Island of Trinidad in the Caribbean. We landed on March 1,1944, and stayed for three days at Waller Field. As the airfield is located inland, we could not see it from our approach over the sea, so we followed instructions, found a certain river emptying into the sea, and just followed upstream through the forest and over the hills until it became visible. We slept in barracks with mosquito nets over our bunks to prevent us from getting malaria. We were treated with fresh bananas daily which were kept in big bowls in unlimited quantity on each floor of each barrack. We thought it great luxury.

The next stop on our southern route was Belem, Brazil, in South America, arriving on March 4, 1944. Our flight to Belem carried us over the mouth of the Amazon River. With the Amazon being about 110 miles across at the mouth, including several scattered islands in the delta, it was difficult to see completely across the river from one side to the other, even from the air. The size of the main channel of water was amazing.

On March 5, 1944, we flew into Natal, Brazil. This Portuguese-speaking city is situated on that jut of land that sticks out on the Atlantic Ocean in the country of Brazil that is closest to Africa. In getting to Natal we flew over some of the most dense jungle that South America has to offer. We had been given special training on survival in the

jungle bak at Langley Field, just in case our airplane developed trouble and we had to parachute out or crash land, as did happen to several crews. On several occasions we were flying so low that we could readily identify native huts and people in clearings in the jungle.

During the two days in Natal, we experienced short, heavy tropical downpours of rain all the while the sun was shining. Also, we followed what seemed to be the custom and each one of us purchased a pair of Brazilian made gaucho leather boots. When off duty around the camp in Tortorella we wore them as relaxation. When I became a POW my buddy, Homer Wilkins, shipped these boots and other personal items back to the States to my mother.

Early morning on March 7, 1944, we left Natal and headed east nonstop over the South Atlantic Ocean, from South America to Africa in one day. It was getting on towards dusk dark when we arrived at the air base in Dakar, French West Africa, which is now known as the independent country of Senegal. Dakar juts out of West Africa at its nearest point to Brazil. Our Navigator, 2nd Lt. E. A. Peddycord, had done such a good job of mapping the way that when we reached land we came in straight on the runway without having to circle the airfield even once, and the control tower cleared us for immediate landing, giving us preference over all other air traffic.

That landing stands out as unforgettable because the runway was made entirely of metal strips connected together like boards (no concrete). When we touched down we bounced straight up some 50 to 100 feet before finally settling down on the landing strip. Eventually we got used to the metal strips as later we found that our home airfield at Torterella, and most all combat runways, had them.

After one night of hearing French spoken by all the civilians around the airport and in the mess halls, we were off again. March 8, 1944, found us in Marrakech, Morocco (then known as French Morocco). In getting there we had to fly over the Sahara Desert. Since we expected no enemy gunners in the desert, we flew as low as 100 feet above the sand dunes for miles and miles observing the various formations of the sand (and hoping the airplane did not give out). The Sahara is seemingly endless, and its composition is just like the movies show it to be. What a sight to behold.

At Marrakech I saw people who were Prisoners of War for the first time. Beside our air base was an encampment of Italian soldiers who had been captured by the

Americans in the earlier North African ground campaign, and who were now POWs in American custody. Some of them changed their allegiance after capture and were doing menial tasks around our base. Some were being marched from one barbed wire compound to another under armed guard escort. To me at this point in my travels they were only a curiosity.

Tunis, the capital of Tunisia, was our last stop in Africa, arriving on March 9, 1944. The thing I recall about this African area is my first night's sleep, or lack of it. I spent the night feeling frozen, being as cold as I ever remember being while trying to sleep. The airfield was on the edge of a desert at Dejeda, on the outskirts of Tunis. Wilkins and I found a bundle of 27 army blankets, and we used all of them over us as we pulled our cots together in a futile attempt to keep warm. I did not get warm until the sweltering sun came out on the new day. Yes, it can get very cold at night in the desert.

We rested for two days at Tunis and used part of the time to visit the city. The Kasbar was off limits to soldiers, and so we mostly walked up and down the main streets. I remember a French movie house was showing "Stormy Weather" staring Lena Horne, filmed in English with French subtitles. We bought tickets and enjoyed the show. We enlisted men could find no place to eat in the city, but, thanks to the kindness and toughness of Lt. Maslow, our Pilot, he talked his way for us to eat in an upstairs officers club, as though we were officers. It was a most delicious meal.

On March 11, 1944, we flew across the Mediterranean Sea, skirted the coast of Sicily, and landed on the soil of Italy at San Pancrazio, in the heel on the map of Italy. We were now in Europe to begin our combat duty.

At this base in San Pancrazio the authorities kept the B-17 we had flown over from the States, and were to use it for command flight purposes. It would later serve in the 5TH Wing of the 15th Air Force in the lead formation of the combat mission. The Captain that had accompanied us from Warner Robbins, however, continued on with us to Foggia, and subsequently became the radar officer assigned to our squadron. After a few missions he was transferred elsewhere.

At San Pancrazio, I had my first real exposure to European-style breads. This may seem unusual to most people today who are accustomed to a wide variety of breads from the local super market, but my culinary experiences in eastern North

Carolina during the depression era were very limited. The mess hall bakery at San Pancrazio was staffed by local civilians who, quite naturally, baked bread the Italian way. Its great smell and taste lingers in my thoughts to this day. This exposure to foreign food was probably the beginning of my craving to eat European-style breads.

I met a Colonel Eno at San Pancrazio out on the flight line within an hour of setting foot on Italian soil. I was an enlisted man brand new to life in the European theater of war and he, a Colonel, began questioning me out of the blue as he walked up to our airplane, unannounced and unexpected, about the various places I had trained back in the States. I felt uncomfortable answering his questions at first because I did not know the protocol for new arrivals. But, he was very friendly, and seemed to want me to open up to him. In particular he wanted to know of any western locations I was stationed at in the States. Upon my telling him "Rapid City, South Dakota," he beamed with delight. Cheerfully and proudly he told me he was the person who had originated the "Eno Express." Instantly, and although I had never met him, I knew him as "Major" Eno whom we were constantly praising back in Rapid City. I had ridden on the Eno Express many, many times. It was simply a farm tractor pulling a large flatbed open body trailer, which was used as a welcomed means of transportation from the flight line to the barracks, some couple of miles apart. Not only did it save us the walk to and from boarding our airplane for each practice mission, but it also eliminated the burden of carrying our high altitude flying suits and other gear. This service had proven a great asset to all of us. Now, I thanked him in person for creating this training service. I had a new friend.

VI. WELCOME TO TORTORELLA

After San Pancrazio there was one more leg of the journey to my permanent overseas combat station. I arrived at Tortorella, Italy on March 15,1944; and this was "home" until the early morning hours of July 9, 1944. This proved to be the longest stay I experienced at any one air base during my entire career – six days short of four months. (My shortest stay was 4 hours at Fort Bragg, N.C.)

Tortorella was a very small farming village in the former wheat fields of southern Italy. It is located just inland from the seacoast town of Manfradonia, just under the "spur" in looking at the map of Italy as a "boot, and about 15 miles inland." On several

of the days we were not flying, we used to hitch a ride on any passing military vehicle to Manfrodinia and swim in the Adriatic Sea.

Foggia is the principal city of the region, about eight miles from our airbase at Tortorella. This was the “off duty” town that our crew visited most. Foggia also had a major airfield, called Foggia Main, which we flew in and out of on occasion as combat required. The town had a large public square with green space and lots of arches and monuments, with one multistoried building taken over by the military for use as our USO (United Service Organization) center. It was sort of a home away from home, and a common meeting place for all of the troops when off base.

This USO was staffed with civilian volunteers, mostly women. The building had space set up as a day room or very large living room for reading, talking, and socializing. There were tables and paper for writing letters home. A recreational room provided access to various games, such as ping pong, pool, checkers, and cards. One could also get light refreshments, and occasionally donuts or cookies would be served. There was also a large performing room for visiting musicians and comedians who would entertain the troops on designated days. While there was sparse decorations, the place always seemed cheerful.

As I reminisce my thoughts go to the time I suggested to the lady in charge of the USO that she plan a date for all soldiers whose homes were in North Carolina to meet and have a party. She liked the idea, promptly appointed me the chairman, and I went to work. Notices were posted of the meeting date and hour some four weeks in advance in several prominent spots in the building. About 83 airmen from all over the area came. We had a big time talking of home and families. Later, I had an airman in my own squadron tell me that after the meeting he took possession of the poster board listing of names and addresses of the North Carolina men attending and kept it as a souvenir.

Our living quarters for our enlisted crew of six consisted of an eight-by-eight foot pyramidal tent, heated by a small pot-bellied stove, and we slept on folding type army cots. The officers had similar arrangements. None of our tents were closely arranged. In the event of a “strafing” air raid upon us (a swooping attack with indiscriminate firing), it was considered less likely that as many would be killed if the tents were scattered far apart. A picture of identical tents has appeared in books of the air war in Italy.

Our military unit was the 99th Bomb Group, 347th Bomb Squadron, stationed at Tortorella. "Sandfly Tower" was the identifying code name of our airfield, used in take off and landing. We were part of the 5th Wing of the 15th U.S. Air Force. The headquarters for the 15th Air Force was at Bari, Italy, a large seaport city on the Adriatic Sea.

Major General Nathan Twining was our Commanding General, the highest ranking one in our theater of war. He came to one of our pre-mission briefings. He wanted to tell us personally of essential combat intelligence information on the difficulties we were expected to encounter that day to, from, and over the target. I think it was for our mission over Vienna, Austria.

A process called debriefing occurred after each completed mission. As soon as we were able to complete our flight line duties, such as cleaning all machine guns, we were required to report straight to military intelligence at company headquarters. An officer, sometimes commissioned or non-commissioned, or both, would interrogate us about our observations and experience during the mission. In particular, they were wanting to know things, such as the following: How many enemy airplanes did you see? What type were they? Did you see any shot down and were they theirs or ours? At what location and how many parachutes? How much anti-aircraft fire occurred? Can you locate the firing positions of their batteries on this map of the area? Now perhaps you can get the picture of what when on at debriefings.

Military intelligence would integrate all information overnight so as to give us updated information on the number of airplanes expected to be encountered on the new day, indicating what areas to avoid on the way to and from the target as it related to diversionary ground anti-aircraft batteries. If our commander told us at morning briefing that we could expect no enemy fighters attacking us, or only 25 airplanes were to be expected, we certainly did not want to discover 125 airplanes suddenly appearing against us near and over the target. It was all a matter of being better prepared for the unknown during the next mission in same general area and to help others rescue any crewmen who may have parachuted out in an area where they could be rescued. It became natural to become very observant at all times while flying.

The "FLAMING ARROW" came into our lives at Tortorella. She was a beautiful new B-17 F, a "Flying Fortress," sitting in a revetment by "Sand Fly Tower" airstrip, just

waiting for us. The words “Flaming Arrow” were already emblazoned upon the front fuselage when this silver fortress was assigned to us. No camouflage paint had been applied to this new plane as supposedly the absence of paint saved pounds of weight, and aided the plane to climb a few hundred feet higher in trying to avoid enemy anti-aircraft shells. I don’t know how the name “Flaming Arrow” was chosen, but it proved prophetic.

Our bomber bore the Boeing manufacture number 42-32063. For easier identification from the air, the designation upon the rudder bore the last three numbers, “063,” in large print, with a big “Y” inside the shape of a diamond insignia, representing the 5th Wing of the 15th Air Force, and the roman numeral II towards the bottom, which represented our squadron, the 347th. Once I saw this number “063" in a book at the mall that had pictures of WWII airplanes in large formations, against cloud cover in the background as the planes went over an enemy target. I now can’t remember the publication, but it was our airplane.

Our normal combat crew of 10 men, assembled at Tortorella, consisted of Pilot 1st Lt. Robert (NMI) Maslow; Co-Pilot 2nd Lt. F. H. Henry; Navigator 2nd Lt. E. A. Peddycord; Bombardier 2nd Lt. J. B. Hammet; Engineer S/Sgt. H. J. Wilkins; Radio Operator S/Sgt. N. R. Bolotin; Tail Gunner & Armorer(me) S/Sgt. E. M. Braswell; Left Waist Gunner S/Sgt. S. P. Cummings; Right Waist Gunner Sgt. M. C. Isbell; and Ball Turret Gunner Sgt. F. R. Salter. Promotions brought other ranks to some in time. Occasionally, an 11th man, a combat photographer or a radar operator, would be aboard. Our crew was soon to begin the quest to complete the then required 50 combat missions. Our reward was in being assured that such an airman was then privileged to return to the United States, have a 30 day furlough, and thereafter have only stateside duty.

A word of explanation about receiving credit – single or double – for a combat mission. Before the Allies began flying out of Italy with the 15th Air Force, the 8th Air Force was making raids on Germany out of England. The policy of the 8th Air Force required all flying personnel to complete 25 combat missions before they could finish their tour of duty, be rotated back to the States, and be given a 30-day furlough. The requirement for us in the 15th Air Force was 50 missions. However, because the bombing raids out of Italy were known to encounter heavy flak and many enemy

fighters, our more difficult flights received two credits for a completed mission, sometimes called a “twofer.” This formula was intended to equalize us in difficulty and hardships with the 8th Air Force. Others have more lately told me that the number policy changed in Italy to 35 missions some months after I became a POW.

Some missions we made to a few places in Southern Europe and Northern Italy were considered less difficult and less dangerous than raids on Germany’s heartland, such as flights to targets in the Ruhr Valley and Berlin made by the 8th Air Force. So, on so-called “easy” target trips (sometimes called a “milk run”) all flyers out of Italy were given one credit for each completed mission. I remember our airplane being hit by the bursting shells of the enemy’s anti-aircraft guns and leaving holes on some so-called easy missions, even though we failed to get credit for an otherwise tough “twofer.

More preparation for fighting faced us at Tortorella. We thought we had been fully prepared for combat in the States. Rapid City had been a good warm up, but these new instructors at Tortorella had been through combat and could teach us the practical things to do to stay alive. During our first training session a seasoned instructor told us: “The average life of an aerial gunner in active combat in this theater of war is six seconds!” Needless to say we all got deathly serious and gave him our undivided attention. (And he wasn’t joking about the “average.”)

After nine big days of intensive training, we received our first combat orders. On March 24, 1944, we took off for the target. During what proved to be a bad-weather day, and after some four hours flying over Yugoslavia, the target for which I have forgotten, the mission was called off. I was flying in the Waist Gunner’s position. The “waist” of a plane is the big open area lying between the tail wheel and the radio operator’s room; there is a gunner for each side of this area. The guns stick out through a hole about two-by-three feet and swivel in all directions. One had to be careful not to shoot his own wing or stabilizer, as did happen to a few of our planes.

Our flying gear consisted of heavy fleece lined jackets, trousers and shoes, all of which fitted over our regular clothes, and with gloves and shoes to match. We also had a lightweight electric heated flying suit with coils interwoven into the cloth, which suit fitted us in one piece like a later day jump suit or coveralls. The heated shoes were separate, and had a plug to fit in a socket attacked to the legs. We would still wear our fleece lined jackets over the electric suit. The temperature high aloft often got many

degrees below O degrees centigrade. At high altitude (which meant for us anywhere above 10,000 feet) we always wore our oxygen masks.

My second attempt at a mission occurred on March 28th. Again I was flying in the right Waist Gunner's position. I suppose that this was to give me more experience in combat before getting into the Tail Gunner's seat, because in those early training days one did not always fly with one's original crew. On this second aborted trip, the planes hydraulic system conked out, and we were forced to return to base before reaching the target, which was in northern Italy at Verona.

To better understand our bombing in the "northern" part of Italy, keep in mind that I was in Italy before Rome fell, before Monte Cassino was captured, and not so very long after the Anzio beach-head landings in January 1944. From my tent in those early days of March I could still hear the rumbling sounds of the big guns of the British 8th Army and of the Germans being fired on the front line of the opposing ground forces, nearby to the north of us on the east, Adriatic side of Italy. We bombed factories and rail heads in the north of Italy in order to shut down the transportation of enemy troops and supplies to or from the south, or to Germany.

Each squadron had its own PX, or post exchange, a makeshift store to buy essential personal items**,** such as shaving gear. The store was open only on an irregular schedule, depending on receiving a shipment of supplies. One could also buy cigarets. Although I was not a smoker, I still bought my share of the allotted cigarettes. I always bartered mine for fresh eggs from some of the local male teenagers who made occasional visits within our camp. Fresh eggs, fried in makeshift equipment on your tents pot-bellied stove, always tasted more appetizing than the canned scrambled eggs in the mess hall. Also, the same locals would occasionally accept your dirty clothes to be laundered by their families back in Foggia. It was all a matter of trust. Otherwise, you washed your own clothes in primitive conditions, in cold water. I never lost but one shirt, and that was a civilian-type sport shirt that I had bought to wear when on the Isle of Capri.

VI. ACTIVE COMBAT – THE 41 MISSIONS

The full force of active combat hit me, and nearly destroyed me, on April 2, 1944. What was to become **Missions # 1 and # 2** took place at Styer, Austria, our target was

a ball bearing factory. At an altitude of 25,000 feet, we dropped twelve bombs of 500-pounds each. From our #9 plane position in the squadron, we sustained 11 flak holes in various parts of the fuselage from enemy anti-aircraft fire. Flak was heavy and intense all the while we were approaching, and over, the target.

What is "flak"? Flak is a military term for pieces of metal of jagged shapes and sizes that spew out as shrapnel in all directions from the bursting of an anti-aircraft artillery shell, *e.g.*, 90 mm, 120 mm, etc. It came at us from the enemy's 90 mm and 120 mm anti-aircraft guns on the ground. Flak indiscriminately kills, wounds, and damages anything it hits. Many times the shell burst occurred so close to my Tail Gunner's position that I could literally see, and almost touch, the fireball in the instant of explosion. Scary! The smoke of black powder follows. In time it begins to work on ones nerves, and many crewmen, both officers and enlisted men, become "flak-happy," or "shell-shocked."

Reveille for my first actual combat mission to Styer came at 4:00 a.m., with H-Hour at 5:25 a.m. H-Hour comes from the French "heure d'attaque," or the hour of attack. It was the onset of our mission. From that clock time forward all activity was totally committed to the mission of the day. Literally, it was the zero hour. It was the required time for us to be ready to fly. It is when we received our essential briefing about the raid at headquarters, learned of our target, and were ready to depart. Excuses were never accepted for failure to be on time! Reveille usually came one hour fifteen minutes to one hour thirty minutes prior to H-Hour. It seemed we were always eating breakfast in the dead of the night. Breakfast came immediately after we dressed, regardless of the hour.

At our briefing for Styer we were told to expect waylaying (a sort of ambush) by some 150 to 200 German fighters – FW-190s, ME-210s, and ME-109s. It happened. I fired 400 rounds of 50 cal. ammo at them. Before we landed at 3:00 p.m., Frank Salter and Merrell Isbell of our crew had each officially shot down an enemy fighter (ME-109s).

During the ariel battle of my first mission, I saw four airplanes take a direct hit from flak, catch on fire, go downwards in a spin, crash, and explode – an American B-24, two German ME-109s, and a German ME-210. From his ball turret position Sgt. Salter shot down the ME-109 that downed the B-24. That day the enemy fighters principally attacked the B-24s, and mostly left the B-17s alone.

Along with two other tail gunners and a ball turret gunner from sister planes in our formation, in a furious barrage of tracer shots, I helped shoot down a German ME-210 as it tried to penetrate our formation from the direction of 6:00 o"clock high. From my position I am certain that I could see multiple 50 caliber shots from several of our squadrons guns hit home in several spots about the ME-210, but it kept flying and shooting us. It seemed to take forever for it to stop attaching us, and go down. P-38 escorts gave us some protection and help.

Upon arriving back at base, we were pleased to discover that the Red Cross had sent several ladies to our company headquarters to serve coffee and donuts to all who participated in the day's mission. It was welcomed enthusiastically by us exhausted flyers. On three or four more occasions, the Red Cross somehow managed to arrive at our base after our return from an exhausting rough mission.

My **3rd and 4th combat missions** emerged as the first Allied bombing of Budapest, Hungary, on April 3, 1944. The target was an aircraft factory that made ME-210 airplanes. We dropped twelve 500-pound bombs from a height of 23,000 feet. Flak was light but accurate.

The day began with an H-Hour at 3:30 a.m. We were airborne from 6:44 a.m. until 2:00 p.m. I flew as Tail Gunner. Again our Pilot was Lt. Grizzel, with all the rest of our crew being in their usual positions. Our plane position was # 2 in formation in the squadron, and we had P-38s as escort. There were 25 to 30 enemy aircraft, consisting of ME-109s, ME-110s, ME-210s, and JU-88s. I fired 150 rounds of ammo.

Missions # 5 and # 6 occurred on April 4, 1944. We bombed the marshaling yard at Bucharest, Romania, which was the first air raid of the war on this capitol city. A marshaling yard is a big collection of railroad tracks, usually side by side, with many box cars containing large numbers of war equipment, parts, machinery, food, clothing – anything that would support the troops at the front lines – and by bombing the box cars and tracks we were hoping to reduce their capacity to continue fighting. If the trains can't run, the troops can't be re-supplied.

Little did I realize that three months later I would be transported by train into that same marshaling yard in Bucharest as a Prisoner of War. Somehow the enemy was able to keep one rail line of many in good enough repair to keep one train moving. The railroad yards and station turned out to be located just a few blocks from our POW

camp inside the city. When the Germans came bombing us in those final three days, we had to walk close by the same train station on our way to the bomb shelter.

Lt. Maslow was our Pilot for the Bucharest **Missions # 5 & 6**, but they gave us another plane, no. 016. The ground crew was still repairing "flak" damage received earlier by the Flaming Arrow. We bombed at an altitude of 22,000 feet and dropped twelve 500 pounders. The flak was heavy but inaccurate, although our plane received 12 damaging flak holes. I fired 300 rounds of ammunition as there were 40 to 50 ME-109s, ME-110s, and JU-88s all about us. We were just 100 miles from the Russian Front. For the Bucharest mission, H-Hour was at 5:30 a.m. and take off at 10:05 a.m. It was 5:50 p.m. before we could return to our base camp.

As mentioned earlier, the radio code name for our air field was "Sand Fly Tower." Without the "Sand Fly" identification, no plane was allowed to approach or land. To make sure of it there was a Royal Canadian anti-aircraft outfit stationed on both sides of our runway and among our airplanes. We got to be friends with many of their gunners. There was a Canadian night fighter and light bomber group whose camp was on the opposite side of our landing strip. We bombed the enemy by day and the Canadians bombed by night. The airstrip was in constant use. Never a quiet moment around the tent area.

Far to realistic memories of **Mission # 7 and # 8** remain with me to the present day. At various moments I felt as though all our crew were within milliseconds of being killed.

This was the second Allied Forces raid of WWII upon the Ploesti Oil Fields in Romania. It was the <u>first high-level strike</u> against Polesti. However, the very first air raid had come from North Africa back on August 1, 1943. Then the strategy was to bomb at <u>low level</u> (tree top) and take the enemy by surprise. Now, on April 5, 1944, the strategy was to bomb from high altitude (above 20,000 feet). I'm not too sure the strategy worked well for either occasion. Their anti-aircraft gunners were waiting for us. They fired so much ammunition at us, though we were flying at 23,000 feet altitude, that from the apogee of shells bursting with flashes of bright light and black powder all around our airplane, the blackness of the air became so thick it appeared to be solid ground, as if one could put down the wheels on the plane and make a landing 23,000 feet in the air! It was awesome! It was scary. It was deadly for many of the crews. We lost several

planes.

On that mission our plane received a direct flak hit upon the Ball Turret frame. At the angle of impact, part of the fragments glanced off. Fortunately, our ball gunner, Frank Salter, was not mortally injured. However, some slivers of glass from the turret lodged in his face, drawing blood. He kept some of the metal that bruised his leg as souvenirs. On the way back, and only when we got far enough to be out of the threat of danger of anti-aircraft fire, the Pilot got us below 10,000 feet. I then left the tail, went to the waist area, and helped manually hand crank the ball turret back inside the airplane. This proved necessary as flak had severed the operational hose line for the turret's hydraulic fluid, and the turret was otherwise immobilized. Frank was unable to extricate himself from his turret. With the help of others we then pried open the flak mangled door of the turret, which had served as the back rest for Frank in his combat position, and rescued him. Since the war I have heard Frank tell others that I saved his life that day. The structural damage from shrapnel to the turret was so extensive that it was completely replaced before our plane could fly again.

At one stretch during the anti-aircraft barrage the instrument panels for the Pilot went dead from shell fire. Also, all external radio communications went out for several minutes. Our #3 engine went dead, shot out by flak damage. The other engines were smoking so badly we almost bailed out. The Pilot told us to be ready to go, but at the last moment we all stayed with the plane, and made it back to base safely.

As I wrote afterwards in my mission record note pad, "The good Lord was most certainly with us." When we landed, the ground crew told us we only had 25 gallons of gas left for the 3 running engines. The plane had received 8 hits from flak and several large holes had to be covered with sheets of aluminum riveted in place by the ground crew before it would fly again. There were also flak damaged mechanical engine parts that had to be replaced.

Looking back to those combat days, I recall that on days of our roughest missions that when it came time for debriefing of each of us at our company headquarters the Commander arranged for each crew member to be issued 2 oz. of liquor, to calm the nerves. You could drink it right there, or if you had some type of bottle with you, it would be poured into the bottle. Some men collected all their liquor until they had completed 50 missions, and then indulged in a big party. Some swapped

their serving for various work assignments from other airmen. I willingly gave mine to fellow tent mates, except for two missions: the time of our crash landing on April 30, 1944, and the day our bombardier was killed. Each occasion had been a very stressful and nerve-wracking experience.

A refreshing easier mission came our way on April 7, 1944. Our target for **Mission # 9** was the marshaling yards at Treviso, Italy. After an H-Hour of 7:00 a.m. (which may have been the latest one for any of our flying), we took off at 10:34 a.m. and got back at 3:40 p.m. We rendezvoused with the other groups out over the Adriatic Sea (east side of Italy) and stayed over water all the trip except for 45 minutes to and from the target over land. While over the target we dropped six 500-pound bombs from an altitude of 20,000 feet. I did not fire any ammo for no enemy planes bothered us. Maybe our P-38 escort had something to do with chasing the German fighters away. While we were over the target, we encountered intense but inaccurate flak. Lt. Maslow was our Pilot, flying position #5 in the formation. Due to the heavy structural damage to the Flaming Arrow in the previous raid, we flew plane no. 209 until ours could be fully repaired.

Mission # 9 was my first "easy" round trip to the target. But "easy" needs to be understood in terms of who is giving the definition. All my earlier trips had been exceedingly rough. Of all my completed missions, 13 were designated two-for-one, and 15 were single credit – including my incomplete last mission, # 41, counting as a single. Had I been able to complete that mission, it would have been a double count as the target again was the Ploesti Oil Fields, my fifth trip to Ploesti!

It is an interesting sidelight that on the day I parachuted into Romania, I had already completed 27 actual combat trips to and from the target--two more than required of the 8th Air Force for a trip home! If I had been flying out of England, I would not have had to fly on mission # 41 – because this would have counted as an 8th Air Force mission # 28 – three over their requirement! Had I been permitted to stop flying after either of my previous three trips, I would never have become a POW! Recently, I have read that the completed mission requirement for those air crews stationed in Italy was changed from my 50 to the lower number 35, sometime in the later part of 1944.

Fischamend Market, Austria, some 10 miles SE of Vienna, was the target for my **Missions # 10 and # 11.** April 12, 1944, began early with a 5:25 a.m. H-Hour. We

were back with The Flaming Arrow, extensively repaired, and flew in #9 position, called by many the “Purple Heart corner” because that position was the most vulnerable to fighter attacks, increasing one’s chances of serious wounds and death.

To help understand airplane “flying position,” I would explain each plane’s location within the formation in this manner. Normally we flew in formations made up of a lead plane called the #1 position, with the plane off its left wing being in position #2, and the plane off its right wing being in position #3. This grouping of three planes was referred to as a “box.” A second, third, and fourth box, etc. of three airplanes would be following, flying slightly below the preceding group, until all planes had a specifically designated position. The military had further designation for each box by the alphabet, and were called Able, Baker, Charlie, Easy, Dog, Fox, etc. Your location within the formation was assigned at H-Hour briefing. Each squadron tried to keep 12 planes of its 15 operational for each mission. Because of combat loses and structural damage by flak and bullets from previous missions, it was not always possible to keep 12 operational.

Four squadrons made up one bomb group. Once airborne the four squadrons of our 99th Bomb Group would join other bomb groups, both of B-17s and B-24s, and rendevous into still larger formations. On some missions we were a part of some 700 to 900 airplanes going to a single target. The resulting saturation bombing would hopefully bring destruction to the enemy and a speedier end to the war. Counting 10 crew members to each airplane and multiplying by 900 airplanes indicates some 9,000 flyers participated on a single mission.

I fired only 10 rounds of ammo on the mission to Fischamend Market. We experienced heavy and intense flak, but it was somewhat inaccurate. For a first time our payload consisted of six ‘super-sensitive’ 500-pound bombs to be dropped on an aircraft factory. This raid was supposed to have reduced Germany’s single-engine fighter plane output to 70 planes per month. The target was very near the Danube River. We took off at 8:57 a.m. and landed at 3:19 p.m. We had P-38s as escorts, and I flew in my usual position as Tail Gunner. April 13, 1944 was our crew’s day off. Even though it was my day off, that is the date I flew **Mission # 12 and 13** to bomb an Aircraft Factory at Gyor, Hungary. I flew as a replacement for a tail gunner who had gotten sick during the night.

I was awakened some 45 minutes before take off and told to go on the day's mission by the First Sergeant, and fly in the place of the sick gunner. When I arrived by special jeep and driver on the flight line at plane no. "000" (representing the last three number's of 7,000 as only the last three were put on the rudder), piloted by Lt. Petrovokovic, the engines had already been started, check up run, ammunition and bombs loaded, and the plane was taxiing toward the runway for takeoff. The plane stopped upon signal from the jeep driver (but the engines never shut down), I climbed on board and away we went to combat. I was well received by this crew for showing up.

During the mission I saw two B-17s from our group get shot down over the target; the crews bailed out, and each plane went down and crashed in flames. Accurate flak burst had gotten the engines of each plane. I saw one enemy fighter plane get hit and explode in mid air, with pieces falling to earth. I saw one of our P-38s shoot down another enemy plane. Our P-38 escorts did an especially good job.

In spite of all the aerial activity going on about our #8 position to Gyor, Hungry I did not fire any ammo. The action stayed just beyond my gun range. From an altitude of 21,500 feet we dropped six 500-pound bombs. We landed safely at 2:15 p.m.

The morning of April 14, 1944, found me back with the Flaming Arrow and ready for another mission. For reasons unknown to me the raid got canceled shortly after takeoff. So, we used the day as a practice mission of precision bombing and some aerial warfare.

My second trip to the oil fields in Ploesti, Romania, occurred on April 15, 1944. Lt. Maslow was back as our Pilot, along with the other regulars. H-Hour came at 5:15 a.m. Take off for **Mission # 14 and 15** was at 8:50 a.m., and we landed at 4:36 p.m.

That "twofer" mission was to bomb the marshaling yards, and to knock out any rail shipment of oil to the front lines. At 21,500 feet altitude, this was a scary, nerve-racking experience. In spite of a steady barrage of very heavy and intense flak, we had no holes in the plane. Their flak was possibly rendered somewhat inaccurate because the waist gunners in some of our planes had dropped "window" – a shredded specially-coated paper, also called "chaff," that fluttered in the air like confetti and was designed to confuse their radar. We flew in plane position #7 and dropped thirty-six 100-pound demolition bombs. I fired 125 rounds of ammo. For a first time, and to our

dismay, we had no American fighter escort. The heavy overcast sky saved us as the German fighter pilots were unable to find or see us in the clouds. We bombed the target through the clouds by "pathfinder" equipment using the Norden bombsight and excellent navigation. The Norden bombsight had been invented about the time WWII began, and it was used extensively by all crews flying out of Italy.

The enemy fighters had a field day with us. The German pilots were brave, cocky, and daring, and put on quite an air show. In the battle our squadron lost one plane, a B-17 (no. 7,000). Irony of ironies, I was flying on this identical airplane on my last mission! What a difference a day makes. Had I been flying with the no. 7,000 crew one trip later I would have been killed. There were no survivors. I saw the plane catch on fire from flak. A wing fell off. It exploded; the engines were torn out of their mounts but the propellers continued to spin for a couple of minutes before falling. The tail section disintegrated into many pieces. The other wing fell off, and the remaining cigar-like fuselage plunged to the earth. Six parachutes were reported as having opened; I only saw two. I witnessed debris falling from the exploding plane ignite the silk of the 2 parachutes. The fire burned the canopy into long shreds, losing what air had been trapped, and they each plunged to earth. What a revolting spectacle! Such combat as this wears upon one's nerves regardless of training and preparation for action.

On April 16, 1944, the Flaming Arrow was in the sky again. However, we had to turn back after flying only one hour because of an oil leak in #1 engine, which was later found by the ground crew to have been caused by a faulty gasket. From the smoke and fumes, I had doubts we would have ever made it to the target and back.

Air battles had apparently taken their toll on our squadron's B-17s. During one incomplete and unnumbered mission, when flying in a plane other than the Flaming Arrow, we had to turn back to base because of engine problems. Upon landing and taxiing a short way the left landing gear strut collapsed and the plane plowed into the ground. (*See* Appendix B.) Luckily, no one was injured. We were all very thankful that Frank Salter, our ball turret gunner, had already gotten out of his turret before the collapse.

Next was **Mission # 16.** We were relieved when the briefing officer told us this mission should be a milk run. Our target was to be an ME-109 aircraft factory in Belgrade, Yugoslavia on April 17, 1944. H-Hour started for us at 6:00 a.m., and we

were airborne for 6 hours and 5 minutes. Maslow was again piloting the Flaming Arrow. Our escort consisted of P-38s, P-47s, and P-51s. After that "milk run," I wrote the following account in my mission notebook:

> To and from the target was easy as falling off a log. Over the target it was hell. In correcting for a navigational mistake, the lead ship put us through a 360 degree turn over the immediate target area before "bombs away." We just about sweated blood because the flak was so intense. Prayers were readily said. The good Lord answered them, and we came back without a scratch, but with nerves on edge. Am beginning to get flyers fatigue.

My short account was accurate but does not tell the full story. On this 16th mission, we were flying in the lead box, called "Able," and in the #3 position. We bombed from an altitude of 23,000 feet, sending down six 500-pound bombs. We encountered no enemy aircraft, but the flak was heavy, intense, and accurate for we had stayed around the target too long in tight formation and the enemy had time to figure out our altitude, direction, and target!. After landing we found out that the lead navigator had made a compass navigational error, resulting in our circling over the target in order to obtain the appropriate trajectory for a final bombing run. I saw no enemy aircraft and did not fire any ammunition. I can't recall correctly as to the number of flak holes our plane received, but they were numerous and serious.

When I arrived at the flight line that morning, I assisted the ground crew with the loading of the bombs into our bomb racks inside the plane, as I had done on some half dozen other raid preparations. Maslow was again piloting the Flaming Arrow. Our escort consisted of P-38s, P-47s, and P-51s. Maybe, all that good escort is the reason I never saw a German plane in the sky.

Combat **Mission # 17** turned out to be a breather on April 20,1944. We met the Flaming Arrow at the 5:50 a.m. H-Hour, and after a run of 5 hours and 50 minutes we were back on base. Most of the time we spent circling to gain altitude of 21,00 feet to make group formation. Our plane was in the #2 box, "Baker," and the #2 Position.

On this mission our secondary target was to bomb harbor shipping at Venice, Italy. I am inclined to remember Venice as a secondary target because extensive cloud cover interfered with our assembling for the first choice assignment. The various groups of planes were unable to stay in a reasonable formation pattern inside the

clouds that day. We did not encounter any fighters or flak, which we thought was utterly amazing. And no, we did not bomb any of the historic canals or buildings.

From my position in the Tail Gunner's seat, as I looked back at Venice I could see the bombs exploding on the ground, but almost all of the bombs from all planes missed their targets. I can remember saying that this was the worst precision bombing I had ever seen. While I am sure we hit some of the outlying shipping, I vividly recall one very large ship, anchored separately and apart from all others in a larger isolated canal, escaping any direct hits from any of our crews. Someone said maybe the concussion from the near misses put the ship out of commission.

The killing and death of war came home to our crew in **Missions # 18 and # 19.** The fear of death became a reality. H-Hour came at 7:30 a.m. on April 23, 1944. All of us took off at 10:45 a.m. but we landed at 5:00 p.m. with death among our crew.

We left on that mission to bomb an Aircraft Factory at Weiner Nuestadt, Austria. Before we could reach the target area enemy fighters attacked us in formations of 12 to 15 planes at a time. Finally, our escorts of P-38s and P-51s drove them away. All together there were about 150 enemy planes attacking us. I fired 50 rounds of ammunition. When the fighters were gone the focus shifted to the bomb run.

Our bombardier for this mission, as it had been for most of our previous missions, was 2nd Lt. J. B. Hammet of Baton Rouge, Louisiana. Although this was **Missions # 18 and 19** for me, this was Mission # 13 for Lt. Hammet. He was a very good man and possessed a wonderful personality. I seem to remember that he had a young wife, but no children.

When we reached the target, flak was bursting all around us. Hammet assumed his position at the bombardier's station, sighted the target and released our payload of bombs. We heard his last words over the intercom announcing the accomplishment of his duty: "Bombs away! Bomb bay doors closing." Our plane then took a direct hit by a burst of flak from directly below the bombardier's station.

The navigator informed the Pilot and crew over the intercom that Lt. Hammet had been hit. Co-pilot Lt. Henry took over flight duties for Pilot Lt. Maslow, as Maslow left his seat and went into the bombardier station in the airplane's nose to try and revive Hammet. Maslow tried rendering first aid, but without success. Maslow diverted us to a landing at Foggia Main Airport in a final effort to get Hammet to a major hospital for

help. Immediately upon landing, the base flight surgeon doctor was driven by jeep directly to our plane on the runway. The doctor pronounced Lt. Hammet dead as soon as he came aboard. After the body had been removed it was a very sad ride back home to Sand Fly Tower airfield for all the crew.

Although Lt. Hammet was wearing his GI issued flak suit of cloth and metal that covered his chest and back, a supposed bullet proof vest, the flight surgeon later told us that the burst of flak had literally gone straight up from the ground, and straight up the left side of his body and under his armpit and flak-jacket. His heart had been ruptured by a metal fragment.

We all went to Lt. Hammet's military funeral, with burial in a grove of olive trees on the outskirts of Foggia, Italy. There was grave after grave in that grove-turned-cemetery; all fresh, and with recently killed airmen, but I did not know personally any of these other deceased air crew members. But I had heard of some of them, as I read their grave markers.

Two other crew members were slightly wounded on this same trip. Norman Bolotin, our radio operator, received two flak wounds in his legs which caused bleeding, and needed first aid attention, but proved not to be very serious. Homer Wilkins, the top turret gunner, received a crease mark on his forehead from flak that also damaged a portion of his turret by his head.

Just two days after Lt. Hammet died we left base trying for our next mission. On April 25, 1944 we flew into much rain and bad weather. We could not bomb a designated target as no bombardier was able to see it through the Norden bombsight, so the mission was cancelled. Our four hour ride through rough weather was unpleasant, but otherwise uneventful.

Piombino, Italy, with its foundry and blast furnaces, became our target for **Mission # 20.** Piombino is located on the west coast mainland on the Gulf of Follonica, with the Island of Elba being just across the way west in the Mediterranean Sea. Elba had been Napoleon's first place of exile.

We began preparing for the Piombino mission with an 8:30 a.m. H-Hour on April 28, 1944, with take off at 11:52 a.m. Our Pilot changed to Lt. Gardner, but we were still on the Flaming Arrow. I saw three FW-190's enemy fighters, but they kept their distance. I fired no ammo. The flak was slight, light, and inaccurate. We dropped six

500-pound bombs at an altitude of 21,000 feet. Mission# 20 became a "milk run" – the easiest trip to date. We landed safely at 4:50 p.m.

For **Mission # 21** on April 29, 1944, we bombed a submarine base and dry dock yards at Toulon, France, a port city on the Mediterranean. We dropped six 1,000-pound bombs from an altitude of 23,300 feet. I saw no enemy aircraft, and I fired no ammo. The flak was slight, light, and inaccurate. H-Hour began at 4:10 a.m., with takeoff at 7:15 a.m. and landing at 3:20 p.m.

Although the trip seemed quite long, the mission itself was quite easy. The bombing was not our best, yet several good hits were scored. On the way to the target, we flew over central Italy for the first time. It looked more interesting and inviting than the Foggia area where we were stationed. In crossing the Mediterranean Sea between Italy and France we flew over the Island of Corsica. That bit of land is much larger than I had imagined. There were snow-capped mountain ranges. The island appeared from the air to be a very nice place to live. (Corsica was Napoleon's birthplace.)

Mission # 22 began with an H-Hour of 4:25 a.m. on April 30, 1944 and with a take off at 7:45 a.m. There were a couple of changes to our regular crew: 2nd Lt. H. M. McLean was Co-pilot, as we were now training him, and 1st Lt. F. W. Kloss was Bombardier. Lt. Maslow remained as our Pilot. The target was an aircraft factory in Varese which is in northern Italy. Participating in this raid almost killed us by ending in a fiery crash landing.

The route for the mission began a few miles offshore on the east side going north up the Adriatic Sea. Shortly after passing the port of Rimini we cut inland and zigzagged the rest of the way to Varese, which is approximately 20 miles from Switzerland. Unfortunately, we had to battle our way to the Alps. A gun battle such as you hear about in the comic books took place that fateful day. For 80 miles or more we had a running slugfest with enemy fighters. The attack started near Ferrara, Italy. There was no ceasing of fast, furious, and lengthy action until the affair was totally at an abrupt end.

The Germans were as aggressive as robots. Their fighters, ME-109s & FW-190s made between 30 and 40 individual passes at our plane and our squadron in their attempts to shoot us down, with their guns blazing all the way. Our plane was flying #8 in the Fox box of our 99th Bomb Group. On this day the plane flying in the #7 spot had

returned to base earlier with engine trouble. The #6 spot was covered by Lt. Klein's crew in plane no. 014, which was flying approximately100 feet of my plane. I saw Lt. Klein's plane being shot down on the very first pass made by the German fighters. My best memory is that on some earlier mission this same Lt. Klein had been either our Pilot or Co-pilot when we were first starting in combat. With Klein's plane now shot down that left our plane, the Flaming Arrow, flying "tail end Charlie" and "the Purple Heart corner," both very dangerous positions.

The fighters attacked in waves of twos, threes, fours and fives – never singular. The fighters centered their attack from the rear, from 5:00 to 7:00 o'clock level and low. However, they made passes from all angles before it was over. It was seemingly without end. It was action every tick of the clock. There was never a noticeable letup at any stage of the scrap. As one element of fighters would complete their pass a new group would come in from a different angle. They were firing 20 mm explosive ammo at us along with lots of 30 caliber. Except for wondering if we were coming out alive, it was a gunners picnic for both sides of the participants.

I got one fighter, an FW-190, as it came in at 6:00 o'clock level from 900 yards to 350 yards before it began turning off slowly to 8:00 o'clock low, moving almost in a horseshoe shape long curve to my right towards the ground. Sheets of flame burst out from the engine and swept back along the fuselage. It finally rolled over on its back and nosed to the ground, exploding on impact, creating a tall column of black smoke. The verification witness (required by debriefing military intelligence in order to receive official credit) for this event, witnessed from his top turret gun position, was S/Sgt H. J. Wilkins.

I fired in the neighborhood of 800 rounds of ammo before a short round (a malfunction in the feed belt which prevents a next round of ammo going into firing position) stopped my left gun from firing. Then, my right tail gun stopped firing as its ammo feed belt broke and separated from its holding paul. Instinctively, to get the guns firing again I had to pull off my protective flak suit and headset and crawl around and behind the armor plating to correct each malfunction while the German fighters were still firing on us. For the tail gunners protection there was installed a flat sheet of heavy metal about 12 by 15 inches, with1 inch thickness, which was between my kneeling position at chest height and the machine guns on the outside of the armor plating

I had quickly gotten on the intercom at the first sign of my guns malfunctioning

and told my crew what had happened. Our Pilot radioed plane no. 075, which was flying beside us, and told them of our predicament. The tail gunner in plane no. 075, Sgt. Long, kept firing and kept the attackers off from both our ships. With dispatch I had both guns firing again and reloaded my left ammo box with 200 more rounds. I fired about 60 or 70 more shots before all firing ceased.

During the battle we got so short of ammo that when the chin turret (in the nose of the plane and operated by either the bombardier or navigator as needed) would not work and malfunctioned, its ammo was taken out and passed through to the waist and ball turret for use in their guns. We also had brought along 4 extra boxes of ammo, stored in the waist section. That extra was soon reloaded into the various gun positions. I crawled up to assist the waist gunners in reloading and to slide a full box back to my position in the tail. In spite of carrying these extra boxes on board we almost ran out of ammunition.

As the fighting was drawing to a conclusion a 20 mm shell hit our right wing gas tank between the #3 and #4 engines. There were other hits to our plane, but this one in the wing was the damaging one. We just did not know how serious it was until later.

Finally, the aerial circus was over. Why the Germans quit the fight I do not know. They simply could have run out of their own ammunition.

Flak was negligible as we continued on to the target, an aircraft factory in Varese. We dropped six 500 pound bombs from 22,000 feet and headed back to base. Flak was again negligible as we began our return.

The engineer, Wilkins, riding in his top turret spot was the first to notice serious trouble in the right wing. Just as we were leaving the mainland over the coast of the Adriatic and barely had headed out to sea, Wilkins saw fire coming from the #4 engine. The Pilot promptly feathered (shut down) #4 to reduce drag. Our altitude was then about 8,000 feet.

The fire around the #4 engine worsened. The Pilot issued a call to prepare to bail out. Quickly, he changed the order and told us to prepare to ditch at sea, the Adriatic.

Confronted with this new situation we had to throw overboard every loose item on the plane. Even our guns, which had protected us so well during the earlier fierce battle were thrown overboard. We knew that the plane would eventually be lost from

the fire and we were trying to do everything to lighten the load and keep us flying until the last moment of contact with the water.

While we were getting everything in shape for ditching, the fire continued to rage. As the fire enlarged the Pilot found it had severed all flight control mechanisms. Maslow had lost complete control of the airplane. The plane dropped closer and closer to the sea and the engines lost all power to climb. We had lost so much altitude that we were less than a couple of hundred feet above the waves.

That day the Adriatic was so choppy with white caps that ditching became impractical. We all knew that any landing in rough water could rip the plane apart. Never the less, we were now too low to bail out. The crew gathered in our ditching station, located amidship ship in the radio room, waiting for whatever was to come.

Soon we hit *ground*! Not *water*! As Lt. Maslow later told us, while sliding along the ground the left wing hit an olive tree, striking it between the plane's #2 inboard engine and the main fuselage, severing the left wing completely off at the fuselage. The ground crew recovery team told us later that the severed wing was found 69 feet apart from the main body of the burned out plane. Thus, our plane at impact still had a high rate of speed.

The ball turret guns had been pointed straight down when the gunner exited his turret for his ditching station. This probably saved Isbell's and my legs from being broken when the camera well door in the floor of the radio room collapsed, which interior floor we had been crouched upon before the crash. All of us were violently thrown about the interior of the room. My legs dangled in the well space of the empty camera well as we were sliding along the ground. My first thought was that my right leg had been broken. After extricating it from the well space debris, I discovered it was hurting but not severely damaged. Everyone wound up in a different spot from where moments earlier he had been crouched, with some piled on top of others.

The "Flaming Arrow" was ripped apart. While we were in the act of crashing on land, I thought, subconsciously, we were still over water and had landed in the sea. During those final minutes none of us in the radio room had any communication from the Pilot. If the plane was being ditched at sea, my first duty assignment upon ditching was to jettison the life rafts, whose release handle was in the top of the radio room. I started reaching for the release handle, but in the next second I somehow realized we

were on dry land, and began to climb out of the top hatch of the radio room, after others exited.

Unknown to us in the radio room at the moment we neared the water, the Pilot observed land dead ahead of our direction of glide over the sea. By pure luck, we were also headed straight for a British air field just over the beach, but a Spitfire fighter was taking off on our approach, and we could not land on its runway. Also, the controls wouldn't turn the plane to make a landing on a taxi strip, the fire having severed all systems controlling flight. So, dead ahead we plunged, as I learned later – by a house, past the airfield, over an orchard, and into a wheat field – making a belly landing.

The navigator was first out of the radio room escape hatch, then Bolotin, Isbell, myself and Wilkins. To save waiting time in line for the radio hatch, where each had to wait a turn and struggle to pull up to the roof, the bombardier, Cummings and Salter quickly chose to go out through the tail gunner's escape hatch. The Pilot and Co-pilot went out through their windows. All got out alive. Seven received injuries.

When I stuck my head out the escape hatch, I felt such extreme heat from the fierce flames and raging fire in the right wing gas tanks and front fuselage that I had moments of doubt that I would ever get out alive. Even after going over the top and sliding down the side to the ground, the heat was so extreme I felt I would be burned alive. For relief, I fell to the ground and crawled some 25 feet along the fuselage. I stopped under the tail section of the plane. But the flames and heat drove me to scratch out the dirt with my hands from underneath the collapsed horizontal stabilizer of the tail section and make a run for safety straight out the rear, away from the flames.

Five of our crew received face and head burns. In all, seven crewmen received injuries. I received a concussion from being thrown around wildly in the crash, my head hitting the radio table, which blow caused a depressed gash the width of an index finger to bleed in the top of my scalp. I developed two blood clots (hematoma's) on the back side of my head towards the neck, and various bruises.

Bolotin was the worst of the lot. His severe face and head burns kept him in the 61st station hospital in Foggia for about 5 weeks. In the process of climbing out the radio hatch he got so entangled that his strength gave out. Sgt. Isbell came to his rescue and practically through him out. For this bravery in saving Bolotin's life while his own was endangered, Isbell was later awarded the Soldier's Medal.

By the time we had all run a few hundred yards in getting away from the burning plane, which we anticipated would explode at any moment, a British 8th Army Division truck appeared from out of nowhere to pick us up. Luckily, we had managed to crash on the south side of the front lines of the allies and German warring forces. The driver had seen our plane in distress and was rushing to our aid. Three minutes later all of us had been rounded up, as another truck arrived. All were soon transferred to a British ambulance and carried to a British field hospital (consisting of big tents). Here they stopped the bleeding on top of my head. After their medics had treated and bandaged all of us we got back on the same ambulance and headed for our home base. From the sight of my head wrapped completely in white gauze bandages, this made it look like I had on a "turban." On my arrival at home base our medics and flight surgeon initially thought I had received the worst injuries of the lot. My bruises, head gash, face and forehead burns, concussion and blood clots all healed in time – no broken bones.

Along the way back home we stopped at the American 4th Field Hospital at San Severa, had chow (supper), had Bolotin's face better attended, as he was suffering extensive face burns, and were on our way again to Foggia. We left Bolotin at the 61st Station Hospital (American) on the outskirts of Foggia, and then drove, still in the same British ambulance, back to our tents at Tortorella, arriving about 7:00 p.m. The time of the crash had been about 2:15 p.m.

Perhaps I can best report this raid by copying a portion of what I, then 21 years of age, wrote in my mission book the following day:

> This was the one experience in my life I never want to have happen again. We took off in a Flying Fortress and returned in a British ambulance. We factually landed on a wing and a prayer. Death stared us in the face. The good Lord's spirit made us reasonably calm. God answered our prayers. He saved our lives.

From my treatment at the various station hospitals, I was fortunate that my forehead burns healed nicely in about two or three weeks, and I have no scars today. The blood clots, hematomas, were treated by the flight surgeon at base camp. By the time we arrived at Torterella the bleeding on top of my head had stopped. Good work by the British medics.

While my concussion was healing the flight surgeon had me grounded from flying. The finger deep depression across the top of my head, caused by the table edge, still

causes strange nerve sensations at unpredictable times to this day. There have been many days of much pain. The skin over this depression took years to return to normal. The area remained sensitive to combing my hair for many years. I believe my injuries received from this crash were the direct and proximate cause of my developing a carotid artery cavernous fistula in my left forehead in 1994. Skeptics may doubt the connection, but many signs and feelings in my head over all the years keep me as a firm believer of this crash as the only cause. It was May 21st before I was returned to full duty. I was awarded the Purple Heart for these injuries. (For pictures of Flaming Arrow after this crash landing, *see* Appendix C.)

For this mission to Varese we were given but a single credit in spite of its severity. The Flaming Arrow actually lived up to its name. In flames it met its doom, being totally destroyed. We had taken off in a Flying Fortress but returned home in a British ambulance. This became my first of three times to be listed on our squadron's records as "Missing In Action" (MIA).

While Maslow and Bolotin were in the 61st station hospital recuperating, I visited them almost daily. Maslow had injured his right knee quite badly in our earlier plane crash. One day when I was entering Maslow's room, there stood by his bedside an amazing blond beauty talking to him. She was Madeleine Carroll, a celebrated stage and screen actress, world famous in her day. She was wearing a red cross uniform. Soon I was speaking to her as well (while being astonished to be face-to-face with a movie star).

She performed first as a stage star in England, where she was born. Later in Hollywood, she was in such notable movies as: "The Prisoner of Zenda" (1937); "Café Society" (1939); "One Night in Lisbon" (1941); and "My Favorite Blonde," with Bob Hope (1942). She also starred in films by Alfred Hitchcock.

Madeleine Carroll's sister was killed in London in a German bombing raid on October 7, 1940. It is said that this event changed her life. She joined the Red Cross in 1942 and worked for them in Italy and other countries between 1942 and 1946. She dedicated herself to peace and helping others. She was attached to the 65th Station Hospital for the military in Foggia, Italy.

On other visits to the hospital, I continued to see Miss Carroll visiting in both Maslow and Bolotin rooms, and each time I had extended conversations with her.

Maslow and Madeleine seemed to take a particular liking to each other.

Some 10 days after the crash, the company commander decided our crew needed some R&R (that's Rest and Relaxation). He was right. We were delighted when we found out that we were going to the Isle of Capri.

Capri is an island, of Roman fame and romance since the days of antiquity. Even today it is a vacation or holiday favorite retreat. Capri is located on the opposite side of Italy from Foggia, some 25 miles across the Bay of Naples in the Tyrrhenian Sea. On May 10, 1944, just our crew of 10 men climbed aboard a specially assigned B-17 and we were flown as passengers to Naples, Italy.

Both in going to and coming from the airbase in Naples we were treated to a fly around of Mt. Vesuvius. This normally dormant volcano, which is located just inland from the Bay of Naples and nearby to Pompeii, was newly active, and I was witnessing its eruption. The eruption that became world famous in the history books had occurred back in the year 79 A.D. The 1944 eruption was much calmer and with far less damage. After our airborne tour of Mt. Vesuvius we landed in Naples where we were transferred to the harbor, put on a waiting ship and transported across the Bay of Naples to our rest camp on the Isle of Capri.

Life on Capri was a ball. The first few nights we were billeted in the former hillside villa of Count Chiano, the son-in-law of Mussolini. His villa had been confiscated by the Allied Forces. Later, we stayed in a quaint old hotel just off the main square. The dining room food was excellent, and an Italian musician performed on violin for us each night at dinner. Of course, we visited the Blue Grotto, just as all tourists of today experience it. There is hardly a site on the island that our crew did not explore – the dock area, the funicular, Capri square at the clock tower, Anna-Capri at the top of the mountain, the Roman ruins of Tiberius's castle or villa, and all spots in between.

We were supposed to stay in Capri for only one week; however, German fighters bombed Naples harbor on our sixth night and seventh day. While we were too far away to be directly involved by the bombing we did see in the distance some of the fighters flying around. With the bombing of the harbor all shipping came to an abrupt halt. We were "forced" to stay two extra days before the "all clear" was given on May 19, 1944.

Upon our return to home base, I learned that I had been promoted to Staff Sgt. on May 15, 1944. I kept that rank until my final discharge.

On May 21, 1944, it was back to the old grind. Although we had lost the original Flaming Arrow in the crash of April 30, 1944, the name did not completely disappear for our crew. A waist gunner soon made a sign about 12 inches by 2 feet on a piece of sheet metal from a damaged plane and painted the words "Flaming Arrow" in orange/red on the metal's green background. This sign was hand-carried from plane to plane and put in a place of prominence in the waist area of each plane for the remainder of our missions.

Our squadron participated in a practice mission that lasted 4:15 hours. Frequent practice kept up our various skills as a crew. Such training also helped in obtaining more accuracy in executing the final run over a target with bomb bay doors open in those final moments before "bombs away."

Our **next mission** had no number for me. I call it a significant mission because we were repeatedly hit by flak, several of our crew sustained personal injuries, and I was more afraid of being killed than I had ever been before. Our plane did not return to base. We had to make a hair raising emergency landing far from home, and for a second time I became listed on our squadron's records as MIA. Nonetheless, we received no official credit for the mission.

It happened this way: on May 25, 1944, our 99th Bomb Group, of which our 347th was one of the four flying squadrons, was assigned with other groups the task of bombing Lyons, France. Lt. Weinberg was our Pilot. Maslow, our regular Pilot, had injured his right knee (for which he had surgery months later) in the crash of April 30, and was still recovering. I was flying as Tail Gunner. We were in plane no. 51. As best I can recall, this plane bore no name, such as Flaming Arrow.

Although we had a navigator on board our own plane, the flight path was plotted by the lead navigator who flew in the group command airplane in the #1 position in the #1 box. All others were required to follow the course plotted by the leader of the group. To save a few miles of air travel and therefore to save some gas, the lead navigator plotted a flight course from base that carried us northwesterly towards Rome, before turning out to sea towards France. On the map this appeared as the shortest flying route.

The lead navigator was fairly fresh from the States and was apparently ignorant of the course of the war with the ground troops. He apparently did not know or appreciate that Rome and its environs were still in German hands! The misjudgment and

misdirected plotted course of this navigator carried the entire group of airplanes directly over the warring ground forces front lines – and at a very low altitude.

When we reached a point in the air just inland and eastwardly from the American Anzio beach head landing site, and where the main German-Italian army of infantry and artillery were entrenched between Anzio, Montie Cassino and Rome, all hades broke loose. We were then flying at low altitude directly across and over the front lines of this theater's ground combat. When over enemy targets we usually flew at an altitude of approximately 23,000 to 28,000 feet. Today, our planes indicated altitude in the area of danger was 7,500 to 8,000 feet. Low mountain peaks in the vicinity ranged from an altitude of 5,000 to 6,500 feet. Flying in tight formation under these low altitude circumstances made us "clay pigeons" for the kill from below.

Totally unexpected, all of a sudden shell bursts from the ground started coming at us from every direction of the compass. With each burst the spots of firing from the ground were clearly visible to us in our plane. Also, the shell bursts alongside our airplane were clearly visible, and the thud of metal against our aircraft was clearly heard above all the flight noise. The Germans were exceedingly accurate with their front line ground artillery and their anti-aircraft guns, now all pointed directly at us, several hundred airplanes. Our plane received 51 major flak holes from the barrage. The #4 engine was shot out; the #3 engine was fast going out from being hit. The tail section where I sat had extensive damage. The Germans completely broke up the mission for our group of planes and none of us ever reached the target. Several were shot down.

Both our navigator, King, and our bombardier, Gardner, were hit and injured by flak. The navigator's helmet was knocked off his head. Two engines were knocked completely out, and a third was sputtering badly and threatened to stop functioning at any moment. As fast as possible we headed out over the Tyrrhenian Sea, and slowly turned south.

In order to maintain altitude and out of fear of our payload of six 1,000-pound bombs exploding while still in the bomb bay, we quickly released all bombs at one time into the Tyrrhenian Sea. After a little more than two hours of flying since leaving base, and fearful of crashing because of structural damage to the plane, and the Pilot slowly losing control of the plane, we were forced down.

On two engines and many prayers the Pilot turned towards land and soon found

by luck a small airfield under American control and made an emergency landing. The name of this airfield I cannot now remember, but it was several miles north of Naples. The quite small converted landing strip for this airfield had originally been an automobile test strip ground track for the Alpha-Romero auto maker, who had a factory nearby, and consequently the strip was not up to the standard needs of handling the landing a B-17. We used up the entire length of the runway, and almost continued traveling into an undeveloped waist area, before being able to bring the plane to a complete stop. After landing we saw that engine oil completely covered the top and underside of engine #4, and engine #3 had oil strung back on the bottom of the fuselage all the way to the tail gunners door. All of this resulted from severe structural damage from flak. A miracle, the plane did not catch on fire.

That night we were fed and housed at the airfield in barracks which had once been living quarters for the Alpha-Romero auto factory workers, now dispossessed. The next day our crew was allowed to go into Naples for a visit, as we awaited the arrival from Torterella of a rescue airplane, and subsequent return to base late the next day. Our officers took us on a very nice spin around all the usual sights while touring Naples.

On my eventual return to Tortorella, I wrote in my mission book the following comments about my experiences of May 25, 1944:

> I was the scaredest today than I ever was before in my whole life. I expected any minute that our ship would catch on fire and explode in mid air, or that I would get hit by flak. The good Lord God heard my prayers and kept me safe. On this mission I was so scared that I trembled like a leaf when flak popped near me. This is the first time I have experienced such fear. I sincerely trust that I will be spared from forever again being so afraid. Even when the plane would twitch in the air from weather, I was jumping with my nerves.

Mission # 23 produced a new experience for me. The day's work of May 27, 1944 began with an H-Hour briefing at 3:00 a.m. at our squadron headquarters. That is when and where I learned I had been chosen to fly as a Bombardier.

Our target was the marshaling yards at Avignon, France. We flew in plane no. 987 in #5 position in Baker box and took off at 6:20 a.m. headed to Avignon. We were soon accompanied by an escort of P-51 fighter planes to and from the target. Lt. Henry, normally our Co-pilot, flew as our Pilot. Maslow's injured knee from the earlier crash landing was still bothering him. In the interim he had spent several days in the 61st

Station hospital seeking relief, and had not yet been returned to flying status.

Our regular bombardier had been killed in combat. Our one replacement bombardier was sick. There were no other spare bombardier's in our bomb squadron because they also had been "killed" in combat. Our plane simply could not go on a bombing assignment without a bombardier. The flight was not cancelled. I flew as the Bombardier!

This position is normally filled by a trained officer, but these were not normal times. Necessity in war alters rules. As the chief armament person for our crew, and under Pilot Lt. Maslow's wise training, I had learned some of the basic duties of a bombardier. I had previously looked through the Sperry Bombsight under the guidance of an officer, but truthfully, did not know the mechanics of it. I had learned how to get the bomb bay doors open and to drop the bombs. On this morning another bombardier gave me a few quick pointers before take off, and off we went. Me, an enlisted man, performing the duties of an officer; well, it gave me a little pride to know of the confidence the others placed in me.

Over the target in Avignon, France we delivered twelve 50-pound bombs. I used the intervalometer to set "in train" the dropping of the bombs at 50 feet apart at 200 T.G.S., and then used the toggle switch over the target to activate the release of the bombs at 23,500 feet altitude. Then over the intercom I said over the usual: "Bombs away! Bomb bay doors closing!"

As I wrote then:

> I got along well at this new job. Got the bombs off right on the nose. It was pattern bombing. Enjoyed the change. Think I still prefer tail gunning, however. I was able to fly to Avignon without suffering from the extreme fear of combat. Once or twice I got a speck jumpy, but overcame it fine. Hope I can continue to regain my courage. It was a different experience riding in the nose of the B-17 instead of in the tail position.

After being airborne 8 hours because of the distance, we landed at 2:15 p.m. I saw no enemy aircraft and I fired no ammunition. Although I did see flak all around the sky about our squadron, it was moderate in comparison with other flights.

We did not bomb the famous bridge referred to in the song "Sur Le Pont d'Avignon"; it still stands. In June of 1988 while Ruth and I were touring Europe, we visited Avignon and were able to walk out upon that famous bridge. It still does not span the river; the one-third part remaining has existed in the same condition since ancient

times. We were told the missing span was destroyed in Roman times. In keeping with history we did a brief dance upon the bridge, so as to honor the dancing celebration in the French song: Sur Le Pont D'Avignon, *i.e.*, "On the Bridge of Avignon."

A. SHUTTLE MISSION TO RUSSIA

On June 2, 1944, a new phase of aerial warfare began. Our missions became a part of the grand command strategy for the D-Day invasion of Normandy. The American Air forces began a series of shuttle bombing raids from Italy to Russia and back to Italy; and in a sequence of days, shuttle bombing from England to Russia to Italy, and then back to England. Our bomb group was in the first wave of planes to bomb the Eastern Front combat arena and go on into Russia, landing at Poltava in the Ukraine; sleeping, reloading, and bombing the Eastern Front from bases inside Russia; and then bomb yet a third time before an eventual return to Italy10 days later.

H-Hour for our **Mission # 24 and # 25** of 1:40 a.m., June 2, 1944, was the earliest beginning time I remember for any mission. Our plane was no. 092. Take off occurred at 5:20 a.m. We were headed to Russia, but our target was the railroad works at Debreczen, Hungary. The generals were trying to stop anything from being moved by rail at all major places of transport seeking to connect with the enemy forces at Normandy. We dropped eight 500-pound bombs from an altitude of 24,000 feet. No enemy aircraft were encountered, and I saw only a single burst of flak. I did not fire any ammo in the tail gunner's slot from our planes position of #6 in the second squadron.

On this first Allied mission into Hungary, excellent navigation plotting kept us away from all risk of flak areas. Having greeted the day for breakfast before 1:40 a.m. H-Hour, I felt mighty sleepy a couple of hours before mission's end, but I couldn't afford to fall asleep. We crossed the famed fighting "Russian Front" where the ground war between Germany and Russia was in high gear. I remember we also crossed the Dneiper River in Russia. We landed at Poltava, in the Ukraine; which is today a separate country from Russia. American ground crews to service our airplanes were already there. From these crewmen we learned their story of how both men and equipment had been transported over land in large truck convoys across North Africa and the Middle East to Russia so as to be ready for our eventual arrival.

The airfield at Poltova had no buildings standing, just a flat and open space, plus an empty runway. The place had earlier received the "scorched earth" treatment by the Russians. Fearing the prospect of the invading Germans overrunning the territory and being conquered, the Russians reverted to their military policy used against Napoleon when he sought to conguer Moscow. All buildings and equipment of possible value to an invading army were simply destroyed by fire or leveled to the ground. What a strange sight. We saw more of the same when Wilkins and I went to the local town of Poltava one evening as tourists to see the sights. And the "sights" had been intentionally destroyed, with the frames of former houses looking as badly destroyed as portrayed in the movie Dr. Zhivago. Remembering the movie, even one who had not seen Poltava can imagine the destruction as we witnessed it.

My best information is that with our arrival on June 2, 1944, our 99th Bomb Group and the 97th Bomb Group of B-17s became the first American Air Force flyers to arrive inside Russian territory during the war for use in the operation against the German eastward push. The 2nd Bomb Group and the 483rd Bomb Group, flying B-24s, also participated, but used separate airfields.

I was in Russia for 10 days before returning to Italy. The first night in Poltava, I was the master of ceremonies for a six-minute live radio program for later broadcast by transcription from Moscow to the States as "messages to home." I interviewed several of the troops gathered around. Various radio and print newsmen had come down from Moscow for this military mission of which we were a part. One of these men was an announcer-engineer for NBC out of New York. I got his autograph on a dollar bill, but now can't remember his name, but I think it was "Robert Magidorf." "The fellows here said I did a swell job," referring to what I wrote in my log book.

June 6, 1944. This was the "big" long awaited D-Day, the day the Normandy invasion began! (I think the official launch time at Normandy was 5:00 a.m.) D-Day was the occasion for my **26th Mission**.

At some early point following our 3:00 a.m. H-Hour, and a 5:40 a.m. take off from Poltava, Russia, our Pilot, Lt. Henry, announced over the intercom to all the crew that the Normandy Invasion had just begun. Henry had just been informed by command radio and passed the info on to us while early in our flight. Our mission was to bomb the airdrome and installations at Galati, Romania. Thus, I became a part of the global

strategy to bomb the forces of the German Axis countries from all sides. We also served to prevent the Germans from suddenly withdrawing troops from the Russian front and re-deploying them to save Normandy from being captured.

At Galati we dropped sixteen 250-pound bombs. The flak was slight to moderate and inaccurate. I did not fire any ammo. Our escort of P-51s kept the 25 enemy fighters at bay and confined to the tail end of the back group of our airplanes.

The target at Galati was fairly well saturated by our raid. Several German planes were caught on the ground. I saw six flak batteries in the center of town firing at us. While the mission seemed long until the 12:10 p.m. landing back in Poltava, it proved to be an easy one for us.

For **Missions # 27 and # 28** we shuttle bombed our way back to Italy. On June 11, 1944, we started the day with a 3:50 a.m. H-Hour, and with a 5:50 a.m. take off in Russia. Lt. Henry remained our Pilot. We flew in position number 2 in the 2nd squadron and in the 4th group. We dropped our load of thirty 100-pound incendiary bombs upon the aerodrome and installations in Focsani, Romania. As we left we could see the target area well lit up by big fires and heavy black smoke. Our bombs well-covered the target area; several enemy planes were caught on the ground. The flak was slight, and while intense in the distance, it proved to be inaccurate. For military intelligence debriefing I was later able to identify on a detailed aerial map the ground location of six flak batteries operating from the town's central square, for which elimination some American fighter planes were shortly dispatched.

I fired 10 rounds of ammo. The three ME-109s fighters the enemy threw up against us were eventually chased away from our squadron by our escort of P-51s. I saw enemy fighters with their 20 mm canon shoot down an American B-17 plane. The plane exploded in mid-air, while in a dive. Seven parachutes were counted. Seeing an airplane ablaze with fire, explode before your eyes, counting less than the full crew escaping in parachutes, and watching helplessly as all fall to the ground, well, it is a horrible sight to experience. Upon reaching the Adriatic on our way back, I saw an American P-51 Pilot make a forced bail out into the sea. The 97th Bomb Group lost two B-17s; fortunately, our 99th Bomb Group lost none. We landed at home base in Italy at 1:15 p.m.

It had been 10 days that we spent away from Italy on the shuttle bombing runs. On this undertaking all our targets had been well blasted. I greatly enjoyed this new

adventure of shuttle flights to Russia.

On June 14, 1944, our squadron boarded the plane for a mission to bomb the oil refinery at Budapest, Hungary. We were on plane no. 016, and were carrying twenty 250 pounders, as well as propaganda leaflets. We taxied out to the runway, but in the runup of the engines preparatory to take off our #2 engine developed a noise that sounded like it was going to explode, and the engine was shut down. The Pilot discovered that we had an oil leak, and we taxied right back to our parking revetment. It was like "all dressed up, and nowhere to go." We never left the ground.

June 21, 1944, was another attempt, and failure, to complete a mission. Following a 3:15 a.m. H-Hour, I got the guns all cleaned up, the Pilot had run up the engines, and we were ready to taxi, when we learned that the mission was canceled because of bad weather in the target area.

Missions # 29/30 became a memorable reality on June 23, 1944. For the third time I flew into that flak alley of the Ploesti oil fields in Romania. I sweated it out every time we went to Ploesti. It seemed worse every time. (Eventually, I made four completed trips there, plus was on my fifth trip when I became a POW.) The Shell oil refinery was the target to which we dispatched twenty-four 100-pound incendiary bombs. Afterwards, I couldn't see the target for the dense smoke clouds.

I was flying with another Pilot, a Lt. Gough, and in plane no. 998, in the number 4 position, 3rd squadron, and in the 3rd group to bomb. We called the position "being in the hole." While we were well-protected by other planes, the outside ships got rid of "beaucoup" ammo in firing at attacking enemy planes.

Even though we were flying "in the hole," I saw something new from the enemy planes this day. For a first time the enemy planes were so bold as to fly right on into their own flak in order to attack us. Their passes ranged from 12:00, 3:00 to 6:00 o'clock and mostly low – from below on up into us and through us to a high turn around. When it was at 6:00 o'clock level, the enemy was coming in straight at me in my Tail Gunner's position. I fired 30 rounds of ammo. Our plane got hit by flak six times, leaving damaging holes. Lt. William Fox, our now regular assigned crew bombardier, was slightly wounded in the face by flak, and some glass particles were lodged in his skin. I was told that he should be able to return to flying status in about a week.

With Lt. Colonel Barnett as Pilot and our Lt. Maslow as Co-pilot, we had a practice

mission on June 24, 1944. We made six dry runs over Foggia Main airdrome, trying out new secret ways of dispensing the chaff called "windows" so as to foil the radar of our enemies anti-aircraft batteries, and lessen their ability to hit us with their flak. Other GI names for "windows" were: garbage and shredded wheat, it being small pieces of specially coated tinfoil. We flew the lead plane no. 774 which was fully equipped with its own radar, and with only our squadron participating.

The Commanding Officer, pleased with Maslow's and our crew's performance, picked us to fly this same radar-equipped plane, no. 774, over our next target, which was Sete, France (near the Mediterranean Sea). This became our **31st Mission** on June 25, 1944. Lt. Fox had not sufficiently recovered from his injuries on Mission # 29/30, so we had a new bombardier, Lt. Jim Donnovan. Otherwise we had our regular crew together with Maslow in the pilot's seat. Good to be together with old hands tried and true. (Somehow, I failed to record the name of the officer radar operator, a real quiet gentleman.)

In going to the target we flew smack over the area of the Anzio beach head landings of the land warfare forces. However, on this flight we were at a higher altitude than ground fire range could reach, as suffered back on May 25, 1944, and written about earlier. Through a slight overcast spotted sky I saw Rome during this flight for my first and only time of my flying – from some 15 air miles away. Rome was still in enemy territory during all of my stay in Italy.

We were in position #1, the lead plane over the target, in the 4th squadron, 2nd group, 1st wave. We were only over land for approximately 4 minutes, which was the same time length of the bombing run. We bombed the railroad repair shops at Sete with twelve 500 pound bombs. Our plane did the best job of bombing the intended target I have seen since being overseas. Donovan was quite a bombardier.

During this mission and while on the way home, my oxygen system malfunctioned and gave me an unusual amount of trouble. I suffered chest pains, lung burns, aches, and gas pains on my stomach, and was close to passing out. It seems the oxygen flow regulator was the culprit. The ground crew replaced it before our next mission. I partially recovered after we descended below 10,000 feet, and recovered fully by the end of the next day. While the waist gunners were the first to learn I was sick, we could not leave our positions in combat. Only when the Pilot said we were near enough home and low

enough in altitude to safely go off oxygen was I able crawl out of the tail section and stretch flat out and rest in the waist section. Once on the ground at home base I reported immediately to the Flight Surgeon, our doctor for every ailment, about my breathing troubles, but can't recall his treatment. For this flight, as in all our missions when flying above 10,000 feet, we were required to wear our oxygen masks.

Mission # 32 proved to be a relatively easy one for us. On June 27,1944, our intended target had been Budapest, Hungary; but, the final target turned out to be the railroad yards at Brod, Yugoslavia. The day began with H-Hour at 3:20 a.m., take off at 6:25 a.m., and after a successful day we landed at 1:35 p.m. With Lt. Henry as our Pilot we flew in number 7 position, Baker squadron.

I saw six enemy aircraft, but our escort of P-38s and P-51s kept them away from us. Flak was slight, moderate, and inaccurate. We delivered a bomb load of twenty 250-pounders

On the flight to find the original target at Budapest we were confronted with massive cloud cover, and we traveled all over the sky seeking the right place, without any success. There were vapor trails above the clouds from our hundreds of planes in the sky, and those trails stayed visible a long time. Any vapor trails in the sky were very worrisome to us because they gave away our position to the enemy fighters, and to enemy anti-aircraft spotters on the ground. Our altitude that trip stayed mostly above the clouds.

The Colonel leading the group, and who was not assigned to our own squadron, appeared not to know what he was doing (so went the scuttlebutt afterwards), and failed to find the original target. After floundering around in endless maneuvers all over the sky we got orders to head for an alternative target at Brod, Yugoslavia.

The bombing of Brod looked very destructive. With no rain clouds, I could see the smoke and debris. We delivered a bomb load of twenty 250-pounders. Flak was slight, moderate, and inaccurate. I saw flak five times, including two places where our preflight briefing did not know the flak batteries existed. I saw a P-38 go into a vertical nose dive in its chase after a German Me-109, but never could see the final ending of their fight. Our successful day ended with a landing at 1:35 p.m.

It took until June 30, 1944, before we could complete the June 27th intended bombing run over Budapest, Hungary. This became our **Mission # 33.** Our target was

the Marshaling Yards, and Lt. Henry was now our Pilot. (Maslow's right knee had hit the control panel in the cockpit when our plane crashed back on the April 30th mission, and it was still giving him much pain and trouble; only after his return to the States and receiving a successful operation did he fully recover.)

We took plane no. 879 over the target in the #4 position in the lead squadron. Our H-Hour came at 3:00 a.m., with takeoff at 6:00 a.m., and landing at 1:00 p.m. I saw more American P-47 airplanes as escorts on this trip than for any of our previous missions.

In going to, and in finding, the target we did more 360 degree circling than ever before. I felt a certain uneasiness as to just what was going on, and what to expect to happen. After much indecision we bombed by radar at Budapest, Hungary. Using radar became necessary because of the overcast sky. Our bombing altitude of 25,000 feet was the highest we had used to this date. We dropped a load of 500-pounders, all the while being peppered with heavy, then becoming moderate, flak. I saw no enemy planes and fired no ammo,

At one point we reached 26,000 feet, which was the highest altitude at which I had ever flown to that time. Regrettably, only 19 out of the 28 planes that took off that morning in our 99th Group went over the target. Various things happened to the missing ones. My squadron alone bombed this place, and our squadron's planes were the only bombers able to complete this mission by returning to base! We landed at 1:00 p.m.

On July 2, 1944, for **Mission # 34** Lt. Maslow regained flying status and was back as our Pilot in plane no. 879. H-Hour came at 4:00 a.m. We took off at 7:20 a.m., and again headed to Yugoslavia to bomb the marshaling yards in the town of Vinkovci. We were accompanied by P-38s as escorts.

Over Vinkovci our bomb bay doors were opened three different times, then closed, and then one more pass was required to get the intended target in sight. Clouds again covered the primary and secondary targets, all of which were north of Budapest in Hungary. We dropped our load of 500 pounders on target in the face of only three enemy ME-109 fighters, but I fired no ammo. We stayed on oxygen an unusually long time looking for the right moment to drop. We landed at 2:15 p.m.

It was back to Romania time on July 4, 1944. For **Missions # 35 and # 36** we bombed an oil refinery at Brasov, Romania. With Lt. Maslow as Pilot, we were the #1

ship in the second squadron, flying in plane no. 879. While the flak was heavy, it was inaccurate – at any rate it did not hit us this time. H-hour was at 3:35 a.m; take off at 7:00 a.m.

To pull off this raid the commander worked a stunt on the enemy, and it snafued their belief as to our intended target. We flew a distance or 200 miles over the country of Yugoslavia at the low level of 8,000 feet altitude, and through an area where the mountains reached heights of 6,000 to 9,000 feet. Fortunately, no one on the ground started shooting at us, even though the low elevation provided plenty of opportunities. As a group we flew "under" the overcast instead of "over" the clouds.

In releasing the bombs over the target we did not use the same technique every time. For most of the missions we used the intervalometer to cause the bombs to be dropped "in train," so as to cover a large straight line area. For Brasov, Romania's mission we used the method of "salvoing" twelve 500-pound bombs. In other words, the twelve were dropped simultaneously and instantaneously. The results were the best, the most near perfect, of hitting the target of any run I had ever seen. And yes, from the tail gunner vantage point upon leaving the target, one can see much better than from other positions. Smoke from the oil refinery at Brasov reached to a height of 15,000 feet. I saw 10 parachutes of men in our mission who bailed out soon after turning off the target following the bombing run, as their plane had taken a direct hit by flak. We returned to our base at Tortarella at 1:55 p.m.

In our pre-flight briefing for **Mission # 37** military intelligence told us that German troops were in training at Montpellier, France, in preparation for action against us at the Normandy invasion front. So, this day's raid was to protect the Allied Forces from encountering any German replacements or shipment of new units which the enemy hoped to use against us for the ground warfare. We were to accomplish this by bombing the marshaling yards at the railroad gathering lines of tracks at Montpellier. With a successful dropping of twelve 500-pound bombs, I think we pretty well slowed up any early German replacements going to the Normandy front by rail transport.

I don't know when I had been so restless while flying. Time hung monotonous while we were flying over the Mediterranean and Tyrrhenian Seas. Nothing seemed to

bring calm to me. I had begun to develop combat fatigue.

Once we arrived over land in France and while not yet in our final bomb run, I saw an American B-24 bomber get hit by flak and go down, destroyed, over Toulon, France. While over the target during our final run, plane no. 046 in our own squadron took a hit by flak and was on fire. I thought it went down, but on getting back home I learned that by feathering the flame covered #4 engine, and by the crew fighting the fire inside, they finally came home okay. A close call!

Lt. Henry had again taken over the Pilot's position again in our ride to Montpellier in plane no. 097. H-Hour came at 5:00 a.m., with take off at 8:20, and a successful landing at 5:00 p.m. A long day, but we encountered no enemy aircraft.

Northern Italy held some surprises for us on July 6, 1944, as we accomplished **Mission # 38**. We began the day to Bergamo, Italy, which is in the Po Valley, with H-Hour at 4:00 a.m., take off at 7:15 a.m., and landed at 1:45 p.m. Lt. Maslow returned as our Pilot in plane no. 879, and we flew the lead plane in the second squadron over the target. Military intelligence had briefed us to expect no enemy aircraft, and although later we saw several fighters, and fired many rounds at them, they did not become a real threat to us.

During Mission # 38 we bombed the Steel Works at Bergamo, which is a part of Italy's industrial complex in the Po Valley. Those German anti-aircraft soldiers working this valley seemed to have our crew's number. It had been extra rough for us every time our crew went there.

On this mission, as I had done on each of my other missions in the tail gunner's position, I sat on what we called a bicycle seat and rode "backwards," with my legs pulled up underneath me in somewhat of a squat type position. I had my two 50 caliber machine guns in front of me, and on each side of me were two narrow wooden boxes which each held approximately 500 rounds of ammunition. The "bullets" for the machine guns were linked together, and were fed automatically into the guns on the firing pull of the trigger. Since we often fired several hundred rounds of ammo during each mission our ammo boxes had to be quite large, and they were always full at the beginning of each mission.

While we were near the target at Bergamo, our plane suffered an explosion from a semi-direct burst of flak on the tail section where I sat. One fragment of exploding metal

from this burst made a direct hit on my left ammunition box – only two to three inches from my left leg and body. When the flak hit the ammunition itself, the resulting explosion blew the left ammo box completely apart. Then five or six rounds of ammo fired indiscriminately through the side of that box, with one of those rounds crossing inches behind my body over to my right ammo box and striking it. This caused three or four more shells to explode in the right box, blowing away the back end of that box, just inches from my body. Thick black smoke quickly enveloped me and the entire tail section, extending the cloud of burned powder back inside our plane to the waist gunners positions, making it almost impossible to see for a short while before it could dissipate.

I got a direct hit on my left thigh and pelvis by one of the shell casings exploding from the left ammo box. The main force of the blow struck the one quarter inch thick by two inches long metal buckle for the side strap to my parachute harness in the area of my left thigh, and bounced off into the floor of the plane. It made a painfully big bad bruise that was very sore, black and blue, and hurt daily for several long weeks. Great pain and soreness, but no blood. The crew later told me that I've got a charmed life. But for the metal buckle the flak would have torn open my pelvic area and I would have bled to death.

The airmen in the other bombers flying alongside could see all the black smoke from the explosion, realized that our plane had been hit by flak, and thought for a certainty that I was dead. You should have seen the surprised look upon their faces as those other airmen saw me "alive" upon returning to base. Also, the other crews that saw the explosion did not think we would ever be able to land our airplane successfully because of the overall severity of the flak damage we had received. Several flak holes close to me in the tail section were as big as a man's fist. Our airplane suffered 60 separate hits by flak, with 43 of those being in the tail section where I rode as the Tail Gunner. I was extremely lucky not to have been killed. Our waist gunner was slightly wounded during the mission by flying glass that hit his face from yet another separate explosion of flak against our plane.

Days later, in order to make the plane flyable again, the ground crew had to install a new complete horizontal stabilizer, and a structural ring that fastens the entire tail section to the main body of the aircraft. This ring had been severed by yet another direct hit by flak.

After landing, a combat photographer working in our revetment area heard of our damages, and took several pictures of the damaged plane, and one with me by the shot-up tail section. (*See* photo in Appendix D.) Probably what saved my life was that most of my ammunition in each box had been shot up in trying to keep enemy fighters away from our squadron. Very few rounds were left in the right box; more were in the left, about 100 at the most. A malfunction, known as a "short round," had occurred in my right gun shortly before the explosion. I could not afford to take the time to clear the malfunction, so I had to continue to fire with only one of my machines guns working. The explosion put both guns our of commission. I rode out the rest of the mission just sitting there, and praying. I kept the spent casings from the shells that hit my thigh, and still have them as souvenirs of the occasion. These items had been mailed home to my mother, along with other personal things, by Homer Wilkins after I had been declared MIA and POW following July 9, 1944.

Mission # 39 and # 40 proved equally dangerous. On July 7, 1944, our target was the synthetic oil and rubber refinery in Blechammer, Germany. I was it was about 60 miles from Breslau, which city Germany was using as a provisional capitol.

Berlin had been repeatedly pounded by bombers of the 8th Air Force out of England. Expecting attacks, the Germans had this place well-fortified. We encountered heavy and intense. flak, while dropping propaganda leaflets and a load of bombs. Our plane received six hits, leaving big holes. Our crew counted a total of 96 anti-aircraft "flak" guns on the ground in the area of the factories. Obviously, the German military was trying to guard an important factory which they considered essential.

For this trip, Lt. Maslow was the Pilot, and we flew the lead ship for the second wave over the target (a dangerous position, because it gave the enemy time to recalculate the altitude from which we were bombing). H-hour came at 3:00 a.m., take off at 6:35 a.m., and we landed at 2:10 p.m. We were assigned to plane no. 729, a radar-equipped plane that came from the 416th Bomb Squadron, but once aloft we flew with our own squadron, the 347th. We encountered 14 enemy aircraft, mostly ME-210s.

I saw three separate American B-17s take flak hits and get shot down, and crash. I saw only eight parachutes from one of the B-17s and none from the other two. From the crashes I would say all the others were killed. I saw one German ME-210, a twin engine multi-purpose plane, get hit by machine gun fire from other planes in our

squadron and go down in a crash. No parachutes. Since we were flying in the lead plane position, and since the enemy fighters were attacking from the rear, our plane avoided getting hit by the fighters. It was the planes that had been in the rear echelon that suffered the casualties. On several occasions thirteen ME-210s would attack our rear by making passes in trail, and then company front, and every gun in our squadron that could fire let go with all the ammo we could shoot.

These Hollywood gun battles, the death of our bombardier, the many holes and damages our various planes had taken, the several fires on board, all had begun to work on my nerves. I got to the place I could both see and hear flak bursting and popping all around me in my sleep. My crew mates told me I was getting absent minded. Whenever we flew on a Sunday, it seemed that something bad happened on the mission, such as our plane catching on fire, as it did during our career on five different occasions. Fortunately, I survived all five on board fires. Active combat will whittle down even the bravest in the constant exposure to the ever increasing danger of death.

B. THE 41st MISSION

Even though every member of the crew was given credit on the squadron records, my **Mission # 41** was never completed. On the way to the target I bailed out of a burning B-17 airplane, landed in Romania, was captured, and became a Prisoner of War.

July 9, 1944, started in the usual way. After an early H-Hour, by 8:45 a.m. we had just crossed the Danube River and were headed to Ploesti, Romania, for us a fifth time. Our mission was to bomb at high level the Xenia Oil Refinery, one of many there.

It is still painful to recall the events of that day, as well as those days in earlier bombing raids, when we had friends killed and others badly wounded. Imprinted within my mind was the recent event of having seen a B-17 immediately to my left side take a direct hit, explode in mid air, and then see only two parachutes open. Each of them had caught on fire from the falling debris of their burning fuselage, and the flames burned each canopy until it could not hold air, resulting in each man falling like a rock to the ground below. The personal consequences of war as only death and destruction awaiting us seemed to have become more real than life itself. Would I, we, my crew, be

next?

Perhaps the best way for me to report the story of my last mission is to quote from the ceremony given to T/Sgt. Homer L. Wilkins on March 3, 1945, at Biggs Field, Texas, as he was awarded the prestigious Silver Star Medal. Wilkins was our Top Turret Gunner and Chief Engineer on this fateful mission. The base newspaper "Biggstuff" said this in the citation story on its front page for March 3, 1945:

> On July 9, 1944, he participated in a bombing mission against strategic enemy installations in Rumania. Approaching the target one engine of his aircraft burst into flames covering the wings and streaming past the tail and completely filling the waist with dense smoke. Despite the fact that seven members of the crew bailed out (I was one of the seven), together with the imminent danger of explosion, Sgt. Wilkins courageously remained with the ship.
>
> Displaying outstanding initiative and courage, he quickly salvoed the bombs and for twenty minutes battled against the spreading flames until he succeeded in extinguishing them. Assuming the duties of co-pilot (Lt. Roberts, who was the Co-pilot, had been badly burned while in the cockpit on his right face, arms, and shoulder before he was able to extricate himself and parachute out), he materially aided the pilot (Lt. Henry) in bringing the crippled ship safely to the base without further damage.

Using the words of Wilkins' award makes it easier for me to flesh out the story. Why did I jump from an airplane that kept on flying, and successfully returned to base? The answer is that while the fire was raging, I thought the plane was going to explode. I could see streams of flame flowing back from the right wing towards our right horizontal stabilizer in the tail section, as I looked around from my side window in my viewing area. I knew we still had the full load of bombs in the bomb bay, as the fire had occurred before arriving at the target. I had seen two or three of my crew's parachutes open as they jumped out before me**. *I became more afraid to stay than to jump.***

I took off my oxygen mask in my Tail Gunner's position, buckled on my chest-type parachute, and crawled to the tail wheel. Then, looking forward, I saw one of our crew, the Radio Operator, sitting in the waist exit door of the plane with his parachute on and his feet hanging out, in the ready position to jump. He yelled that some of the crew had already jumped. He motioned for me to jump. I crawled back to my escape hatch in the tail section, jettisoned the door, stuck my legs out the hatch, and fell out.

Back at the first sight of the fire, and a parachute falling, I had called on my intercom radio to the Pilot, and still remember saying: "Tail to Pilot, what will you have us do?" I got no answer! A year later I learned that the Pilot's radio was on "Command" position, rather than "Intercom," at that crucial time, and he never heard me. The Pilot had been so engrossed in flying, looking at his "wing man" flying to his left, and talking to the lead ship commander who was giving out final target instructions to all pilots, that he was ***unaware*** that people were jumping out. With the fire being on the Co-Pilot's side and not the Pilot's side of the plane, it wasn't until Wilkins started his heroic efforts that the full import of what was happening hit the Pilot, Lt. Henry. Even so, during these crucial moments Wilkins has told me that he motioned to the pilot to"stay," then he seated himself in the co-pilots empty seat, and assisted in flying the plane back to our base in Italy. As chief engineer Wilkins knew first hand the correct readings of all the instruments for flying purposes, and now he put his training to good use.

Wilkins told me years later that he would have jumped out right away but for the bombs still being inside the bomb bay. When he got out of his top turret and opened the door to the bomb bay, he found the bombs still on-board, blocking his escape route for parachuting, He had to manually open the bomb bay doors (as trained) and salvoed the bombs. Only then was he ready to jump. But he took a last look back inside the cockpit, and seeing the Pilot still in his seat, returned to help him get out. In the process, Wilkins had grabbed a fire extinguisher and started battling the flames, which were then spreading inside of the plane between him and the pilot, and adjacent to the co-pilot's seat and next to the right inboard burning engine.

But for the heroic actions of Wilkins I am sure and certain that the three other crew members would have been killed by a horrendous explosion. Blessed be for Lt. Maslow because back in training he had insisted that every crew member know how to perform multiple duties in the air, including all knowing how to salvo the bombs.

As I learned later, the Navigator, Ed A. Peddycord of Travelers Rest, S.C., and the Radio Operator (a replacement for Bolotin) became too scared and afraid of jumping, and so never bailed out. An overwhelming fear of death in falling through the air kept them from jumping directly after the Co-pilot bailed out, who had been the first to bail out. The Navigator got so far as putting his feet out the same forward escape hatch, and then

freezing up – until Wilkins talked him into returning to his nose position after the fire was out. The navigator had seen the bombardier and the co-pilot bail out, but he never had the courage.

I jumped. Fearing that the plane would explode and spew falling debris all over my parachute (as I had eye witnessed it happening to others on earlier missions), I made a delayed fall and pull of the ripcord. During the fall I still remember saying to myself, "well, you have fallen far enough now," and I pulled the rip cord on the Switlick chest-type parachute, the canopy billowed full with a jerk; there I was hanging some 21,000 feet or so in the thin air. Before the engine fire started we had been flying around 26,000 feet. At he moment of jumping my altitude may have been around 23,000 feet. I estimated I fell some 2,000 feet before pulling the cord.

Weeks later in POW camp a fellow airman who had been flying the same mission next in formation to me (who went down on a subsequent raid over Romania), told me that he saw me jump, and thought my chute would never open. The earlier chutes he had witnessed opened very quickly. He did not know what became of our airplane.

Fourteen minutes and thirty seconds after hitting the air, I was on the ground in Romania. I had looked at my watch as soon as the chute opened, and again just before touchdown. I am told that the troopers in 82nd Airborne at Fort Bragg, N.C. sometimes are on the ground within one minute of jumping – as they jump at a much lower level – sometimes 800 to 1,000 feet – dangerous but necessary to avoid combat ground fire.

During the fall, I kept wanting to put my feet on something solid. My legs just dangled. I felt an initial need for oxygen, and breathing became hard. Looking down, I could see the Danube River (and it was not blue; just as muddy as the Cape Fear). I could see only hills and forest in the area which I was fast approaching. The terrain reminded me of the mountainous area around Chimney Rock, N.C. The hillside towards which I was falling had a slope of about 35 degrees, leveling off into a narrow wooded valley.

The landing turned serious. A strong down draft overtook me. I fell into a tall tree on the slope of a mountain. My parachute caught in the top of the tree; and with a pushing wind, my weight, and the speed of falling, the bending limbs pushed me some 40 degrees to the side of perpendicular. The limbs broke, and I fell approximately 30 feet to

the ground like a ton of bricks. I had survived!

The middle of my back hit a dead log (some 40 feet long), which was laying on the ground. My back felt as though it was broken, instantly, from landing backwards over the log. I felt nothing but very intense pain. I lay on the ground where I fell, crying, in great agony. After a passage of about 15 minutes, I managed to crawl off the log. I continued to lay on the ground, crying from great pain. It was then 9:00 a.m.

About 30 minutes later I had calmed down sufficiently to get out of my parachute harness. I heard a noise of someone moving in the bush. I lay motionless, and to my surprise a man came walking right up to me. He made friendly gestures. He pantomimed that he had seen my plane on fire, had seen an explosion, and had followed my parachute to the ground. He was a partisan (a secret supporter of the Allies) and wanted to help me. He tried to find water for me, but returned empty handed indicating by gestures that the enemy was at the spring, and he could not reveal himself. He indicated that he would go and seek help for me. He wanted me to write a note, which I did, with name, rank, and serial number.

Next, he indicated he wanted me to give him the canopy of my parachute. I did. He cut off the harness, and we hid it under the log I had fallen over and covered it with leaves. During most of this time, I was lying on the ground, as I felt I could not stand up because of the back injury. We were together approximately 1½ hours.

From the way and manner this partisan had pantomimed the seeing of my plane on fire, and seeing parachutes falling, plus his making noises like an explosion, I thought for an absolute fact that our plane had truly exploded sometime after I jumped. During all of the time I spent in the POW camp, I agonized in my mind that whom ever of the crew remained on board had perished.

At about 3:00 p.m. upon hearing different voices and other noises from the forest, as though the wrong crowd was looking for me, and my partisan friend not having returned, I somehow managed to crawl, and then to stumble-walk for a quarter mile or soup up the ridge in the direction of the Danube River. If I could get there, I planned to swim the river and enter Yugoslavia. Military Intelligence had pre-flight briefed us that morning on escape procedures. When I got across the river, I was going to make my way to the Adriatic Sea, and on a certain established day and hour, I was to meet a submarine

which was to pick us up and return to Italy. (On that day, I knew the exact geographic coordinates of the meeting place small sea port, but the interlude of years has erased it from memory.) A small boat of the partisans was to take me, and any others, out to the sub.

I never got to the Danube. After a passage of hours a woodcutter, looking for a lost cow from his mountain-roaming herd, walked up on my location, partially hidden in broken bushes. The way I was hurting in my back, I was ready to be "discovered." I don't know which of us was more scared at that first moment of sight of the other. Initially friendly, he helped me walk to his lean-to slab cabin, built against the side of a 20-foot tall big rock out-crop, and beside a stream. His buddy, who was preparing a meager evening meal, also appeared friendly. They were quite civil, and fed me my only meal since H-Hour, consisting of soup and a very small piece of goat cheese. Sixteen hours had gone by.

As darkness set in I tried to talk with them as to how to get over the ridge, across the Danube, and into Yugoslavia. In my GI escape kit hidden in my flying suit there was a small booklet of essential words and phrases in some five languages. I would find the English sentence and then point to the same sentence translated into Romanian. Then they would point to a corresponding choice of answers in Romanian, and I would then read the English beneath it. They indicated cooperation.

About 9:00 p.m. preparations were made for the escape attempt trip. The men had cut a small tree to make me a walking staff for support. Off we went into the dark of night following a trail, with one man in front of me and the other behind to help if I stumbled, which I did on several occasions. As we walked in complete silence, some three hours later near midnight there was a sudden flash of many bright lights shining upon me from all sides. Soldiers of the Romanian army had me completely surrounded and were shouting at me in Romanian language. I just stood there, until one soldier knocked my staff out of my hands with his rifle, and held up one of my hands over my head – I quickly raised the other in surrender! I was caught; I was captured; I was a Prisoner Of War!

VII. PRISONER OF WAR – BUCHAREST, ROMANIA

Unknown to me, in the utter darkness of midnight, we had walked into the outskirts of the hillside village of Baile Herculane (it means Baths of Hercules), a Romania resort

since the days of the Roman Legions. I don't know to his day whether these woodcutters led me into captivity intentionally or unintentionally. The soldiers separated the two men from me. I was marched away in a different direction.

In crossing the public square in the village on my way to be interrogated, several people gathered to look at me and stare. Out of the night a Romanian Captain approached me, and in perfect English, asked: "Do you eat?" I said, "Yes!" And yet, I was given no food and remained hungry. Only weeks later in my solitude did I comprehend that the Captain meant well, but got his syntax wrong – he really was trying to ask: "Did" you eat? Oh, what problems verbs cause in learning any language.

After several minutes of being on public display, I was taken into some sort of resort hotel offices. A Romanian Colonel appeared and began to interrogate me. Before he could finish a couple of routine questions I was almost scared out of my wits. A German Officer (whose rank I can't remember, but I think it was one below the Romanian's rank) entered the room and demanded custody of me in the strongest of language. They, the Romanian and the German, got mad, started shouting, and were almost at the point of blows, with each insisting on their "right" to have me as their prisoner. Each officer thoroughly lost his temper. By constantly pointing at me and talking in my direction, considering their angry voices, and with each wearing a pistol in a holster by their side, and keeping their hand about the weapon, I thought they were about to kill me on the spot.

It was not until a lady came in who spoke several languages, including French, and who took me a few steps aside in the same room and talked, did I begin to relax. With my two years of high school French, I learned enough in my French conversation with her to understand what was happening, and eventually, what they were going to do with me. I wish I knew more about her. She was a blessing to me, and a very refined and cultured lady. The Romanian officer won the argument; the German left in a big huff. That is how close I came to being shipped off to Germany as a POW in a Stalag work camp.

Because of the lady's inquiry of when I had last eaten, she had hotel-type food brought in to me on a tray. She also caused a civilian doctor to be summonsed about three o'clock a.m. to examine my anguishing and painful hurting back. The doctor reassured me both in sign language and French that it was not broken, although

damaged. However, he had no medicine to give me for the pain. (Nevertheless, it sure helps to know even a little of a foreign language.)

For the few remaining hours of that night, I slept on a cot in what once must have been a guest room in the hotel in which I was being interrogated. An armed guard with fixed bayonet on his rifle stayed in the same room with me to see that I did not try to escape.

Early the next morning I was put on a truck, under armed guard, and driven to a town called Orsova on the banks of the Danube. It was there that I learned the other six of us seven who parachuted had all been captured. We were now placed together in the same quarters, in what appeared to be a meager and barren dwelling house on the banks of the river. Other than cots to sleep on, I can't recall any other furniture. Out the window of those sparse quarters we could see the Danube River and several boats going downstream loaded with goods, and with each vessel flying the Nazi flag. Our meals consisted of soup with lots of water, and old, hard bread.

My first real interrogation occurred here. A bilingual man, a civilian speaking English, accompanied by two armed soldiers, asked for my name rank and serial number. I gave it. This was all the information anyone was allowed to give in captivity. Then, the man asked: "What is your nationality?" I quietly thought that this was an innocent enough question, so I answered: "Why, I am an American!" Then, with a snarl on his lips he brusquely retorted: "Now, Mister Braswell, we all know that the only true Americans are the Indians! Now, what nationality are you?" Eventually my belated additional answer of "English" satisfied him, and he left me alone after that.

While in these quarters my friend Frank Salter, our Ball Turret Gunner, had an attack of appendicitis. He suffered terrible pain, and it is a wonder he did not die; but Frank received no medical help until he returned to the States. (As an aside, while he was floating down in his parachute some soldiers on the ground started shooting at him, missed, but did put a couple of bullet holes in his canopy.)

Our seven crew members that jumped were leaving the burning plane at different times, resulting in landing so far apart as to be strung out over three different "counties" (as we would name them back home). None of the others landed in the same mountainous area as I did. All the others were spotted by people on the ground and were

captured forthwith. They all landed in areas of open fields, and did not have the tree landing which I experienced. The seven of my crew who did parachute from the burning plane were: Edwin M. Braswell, Tail Gunner (Rocky Mount, N.C.); Irving H. Fox, Bombardier (Brooklyn, N.Y.); Harlan H. Johannaber, Waist Gunner (Warrenton, Missouri); Lloyd C. Roberts, Co-pilot (Tulsa, Oklahoma); Frank R. Salter, Ball Turret Gunner (Americus, Georgia); Bryon Scarborough, Waist Gunner (Dix, Nebraska); and Thomas L. Triplett, Combat Photographer (San Francisco, California). Triplett was with us for a one-day assignment, although he had flown one other mission with us in a different month).

After two days the seven of us were marched under armed guard, consisting of a Romanian Captain and two soldiers with fixed bayonets on their loaded rifles, to the local railroad station in Orsova. Without to much delay we were put on a train and headed for the POW Camp, which was in their nations capitol city at Bucharest.

An incident during that train trip has remained indelibly fixed within my memory. For reasons of security, all five enlisted men were placed on the train in a small compartment, about five feet by six feet, with a bench seat on each side and an outside window. The two officers were similar situated. The soldiers stood as guards immediately by the door, from which they could see us at all times through a glass viewing area.

Around noon I heard a commotion and loud talking outside our door. A male voice began shouting in fury and anger. Suddenly the door of our compartment burst open; a man rushed in and grabbed me. I happened to be the person closest to the door. Instantly he started knocking me around with his fists, pounding away at my head and body. I took a beating. I was at first startled, then wanted to protect myself by fighting back, but ended up just taking it. Why? Because the two guards rushed in right behind my attacker, pointing their fixed bayonets within inches of me. I quickly realized the folly of any resistance. My fellow crew members helplessly watched the beating, but we all realized they could do nothing for me.

The commotion attracted a crowd of onlookers from our rail car. Fortunately, the Captain of the guard appeared in a merciful few minutes, took charge, stopped the blows, pulled everybody back, and closed the door. I was now safe, but rattled and scared. Other than bruises and being sore from the blows, I came out without serious injury. One particular blow had been hard enough against my jaw so as to knock me backwards into

the arms of two other crew members, who kept me from falling to the floor.

About an hour later, I had another surprise visitor. To my amazement, and in the absence of the Captain of the guards, the two guards withe the bayonets let into our compartment a Romanian man, a civilian. He spoke perfect English and sounded American. (Later, he told us he had lived in Detroit for 14 years, had worked for Esso Oil, and now worked in the oil business for his native Romania.) He explained in English that he had been in another part of the same coach, heard the shouting and commotion, and could now tell us why I had been attacked.

My attacker was a Captain in the Romanian Army. He was married. About a month prior to encountering me on the train his wife had been killed in an American bombing raid in the city where the Captain's wife lived. He was still in grief over her death. I just happened to be the very first American bomb crew person he had met since his wife's death, and he was determined to take out on me all the frustrations and anger he felt against those who caused her death. (As the French would say in the movies, "C'est la guerre!" "It is the war!")

On arrival in Bucharest at the main train station we were first marched across town to the POW camp at "The Schoolhouse." An elementary school had been commandeered for use as a POW camp. Years later from Princess Catherine I learned that in earlier years this schoolhouse had been a teachers school for women. Here the officers were separated from us. We five enlisted men were then marched back across town to the "hospital" complex, which location put us near the city's main marshaling yards. We were now only a few short blocks from the depot of our arrival.

Our POW compound had formerly been a part of a Sanitarium group of hospital buildings, previously named St. Francis, according to the talk circulating in camp. Yet the Princess told us years afterwards that it was previously called "Regina Elizabeth Hospital." However, the buildings had been stripped to the bare floor and walls, and we definitely were not housed in the comfort of any hospital. We had no medical facilities, except that a small one-story building within the compound did function as a separate building for our sick and wounded fellow POWs – some 35 to 50 men.

On the march to the "hospital" from the "schoolhouse," we five men were each forced to carry on our backs a load of radio equipment, captured from other downed

airplanes, to a depository at the hospital. Although the equipment weighed some thirty pounds and had been wrapped in a canvas pup tent of one of our guards , it proved too much stress for me to carry such a load on my injured back. My back had never stopped hurting from the moment I fell across that dead tree, and I thought I would expire from pain and fatigue under the load. After the train incident, I felt I would be punched with a bayonet if I did not try and carry my load. Fortunately, I finally got the Captain of the guard to understand my back pain, and he then called rest periods when I could not take another step. I have often wondered if I would have been shot on the spot of collapse had I been so marched by the Japanese. By the grace of the Captain, we finally delivered the equipment to the right destination.

Sub-lagarule trezpazetchi was the number in the Romanian language of our POW compound. This meant sub-prison number thirteen, with the officers schoolhouse camp having the designation thirteen. There was a long path beside the barbed wire fence that led from the main road to the front gate of our compound. As I was walking in the path into final captivity, and with my spirits as low as a man could get, I suddenly heard a voice yell from across the fence: “Maurice!” What a shock and surprise. In the army I was always called by my first name “Edwin,” middle initial “M” and last name. Who could know me?

It was Vernon Shive of Gastonia, N.C., formerly of my hometown of Rocky Mount, N.C. Until his parents moved away in the 10th grade Verne and I had been schoolmates. I had run into him quite by chance back on the streets of Rapid City, S.D., and again on the streets of Foggia, Italy. Verne had also joined a bomb group. About three weeks before my arrival as a POW, I had learned on a day off visit to his airfield that he had been shot down, was missing in action, and probably a POW somewhere.

Well, I shouted a return greeting across the fence to Verne. For having this conversation, he and I both got in trouble with the guards. I learned immediately it was against the rules to fraternize across the fence. We were both rebuked in strong commands from the guards and threatened if another word came out.

The gate closed behind me. It was July 1944, and I would live there until the end of August. Once inside the camp, I found my friend Verne. There was a shortage of bunks. We new arrivals had no bed for the first three nights. Verne talked another POW into

pulling his bunk (a cot) up beside Verne's, and I then slept in the crack between the two beds. But it wasn't a bed as Americans know it. There were no springs or mattress. There were three boards connecting a metal foot and head post, with no padding. When I got my bed later we had two sheets. After a month, the Commandant had a horse drawn load of hay delivered to the yard, and we were given mattress covers to put a small amount of straw inside. This proved much more comfortable.

The compound consisted of three buildings. The first was a two-story brick building, "H" shaped, with open bays on each floor. I was in this building on the second floor left open bay, and nothing was private. The second building, single story, served as the hospital or sick bay for our injured and wounded, and the third was the mess hall and kitchen. I heard that the mess hall had once been a barn for horses. By shape, size and beams overhead I was in agreement with the assessment. Wooden tables on sawhorses were set up in the large long open space of that building.

What did we eat? "Nothing," the Commandant would say on the days that the City of Bucharest would get bombed by the Allies. When we complained we got the stock answer: "Tell your Americans to stop bombing us and we will feed you!"

Meals generally came twice a day. We ate somewhat better in the earlier weeks than later because we continually had a growth in POW population after every bombing raid anywhere in Romania. More mouths to feed, but the commandant said he only had the same amount of supplies with which to feed us – no matter how many new men joined us. By rationing, all had something to eat.

The quantities of food were always small. The food we had the most of was soup. Just add more water to the pot that cooks the same amount of barley or potatoes. I don't think I ever had "barley" soup before or since my POW days. At first we had a half loaf of peasant bread per man per day, then reduced to 1/3 and finally 1/4 a loaf. Sometimes the loaf was in the long French bread shape, and sometimes it was round. Most of the time the bread was several days old, and once the round loafs were so old and hard they would literally bounce from the floor, as the sport was tried.

One afternoon a horse drawn wagon delivered a quarter leg of beef to the camp. The meat was uncovered, lying on the open bed of the wagon. I saw this as I was on my way to the mess hall for a turn at KP duty. Even before the meat was taken off the wagon

we could see maggots crawling all in and around it. The cook just washed the meat the best he could. We cooked it in a big cauldron of soup, all ate it for the meal of the day. No maggot was going to keep me from my food. (And, none of us got sick.)

Strange to say our chief cook was a Russian civilian! We became friends. He had been taken prisoner during one of the battles on the Eastern front in his city. He had owned a restaurant, and he certainly knew how to cook. We just never had the gourmet ingredients for him to show off his talents properly.

Another camp incident I recall involved Frank R. Salter. He had been in service in the Infantry for about three years before volunteering for transfer to the Air Corps. From an initial landing in North Africa, he went completely across that continent in the Infantry. Once his unit arrived in Italy, he read in "Stars and Stripes" troop newspaper that air crew members got to rotate home to the states after 50 missions. Frank immediately applied for a transfer. After training he was assigned to our crew as a replacement for the ball turret gunner who went to England. He became so anxious to complete his missions that by volunteering for others on his days off, he was on his 47th mission when we went down. Now that he had become a POW he got to feeling he would never get liberated or get to go home. One afternoon I found Frank sitting on a block up against the side of the barracks, looking down at the ground, and repeatedly saying out loud, as he shook his head from side to side: "I had it made in the Infantry and would not leave well enough alone." "I had it made in the Infantry and would not leave well enough alone."

There were frequent bombings at night of Bucharest by the English and Canadian planes. Such night raids worked on our nerves. And it was a most awful sight to see one of their planes caught in the beam of search-lights and ground anti-aircraft fire zeroing in on them and shooting them down. In all, while in Bucharest I lived through twenty seven air raids, with most of them coming at night. From point of view of my nerves the night time bombings seemed the worst to endure as there was no place to hide and feel safe. The guards kept us confined to the building at night.

Of our prison guards I have good memories of the lieutenant of the guard. His name was Cornelius Valjuan. As he went about his duties he would be in a strut type walk, and he always seemed to stick his belly way out front of his body. This manner of walking caused us POW'S to call him (behind his back) by the nickname "pregnant Pete."

Yet, he was the kindness of the guards towards we Americans.

In recent years I have learned that soon after we left Bucharest that the Russians captured Lt. Valjuan and sent him off to Siberia to a labor camp. After some 13 years of hard labor he was allowed to return home. Still later, when Princess Catherine finally returned to Bucharest, and lived in a two room apartment in the children's hospital that her mother had originally built, and of Valjuan's hearing the Princess was back and in need of health care, he volunteered his services as her butler and servant on until she died, just a short time after reaching the age of 100, which I believe was in January 1991

I got to write two letters home to my mother, Ella Denson Braswell, one during each of my two months as a POW. These were form postcards of 5-by-7 inch size. We were commanded to use only stock words and phrases from a list supplied to make our messages. At some point I was allowed to write one post card to my girlfriend Ruth Cox in Wilson, N.C. For unknown reasons this card went through with my own words, but still with no revelations about actual conditions. Delivery of the mail was slow. As it so happened, when the postman eventually delivered these postcards to mother's address in Rocky Mount, N.C., I had been liberated, reunited with my unit, and sent by boat to the States, and was on a 30-day furlough. I actually met the postman at the door of our home in late October 1944, and received these two mailings at the same time.

An unexpected good fortune did come my way as a POW. I met Princess Catherine as she visited our camp. In the aftermath of the August 1943 first raid on the Ploesti Oil Fields, one of the American B-24 bombers got shot down and crash-landed in the garden on her estate on the outskirts of Ploesti. She and her gardener rescued the survivors and cared for them in her house until they were recovered enough to be turned over to the authorities. While I was there she visited our POW camp twice. I would call her a one-lady Good Samaritan, an angel of mercy, a believer in decency, a believer in freedom and willing to work for it, and years later, a personal friend. She became the most unforgettable character I have ever met. My best answer as to why the Princess would visit us soldiers who were prisoners of her government was to see how we were being treated, and to bring such human comfort as possible. She genuinely cared for our well-being. She secured some books in English for us to read and circulate, and she got some medicine for our sick bay comrades.

On six occasions after the war the Princess was our house guest in Fayetteville, N.C. It was through fellow POW Verne Shive that she made contact with us, having ultimately escaped from the Communists. Her married last name was Caradja. (Her husband was a Prince.) She preferred being called Princess Catherine or Catherine. In Romania everyone knew the names of the ruling family, and its princely relatives, and no last name was necessary to be said. Her grandfather was a Cantacuzino, and during the Princess later visit to Douglas Byrd High School in Fayetteville one of the students found the grandfather listed in the Encyclopedia Britannica. She explained to us everything the article said about her grandfather. He and his wife had helped raise the Princess in her "teen" years. The book stated the grandfather's net worth in the year 1935 as being $135 Million (a depression year)!

After arrival in the United States, the Princess found friends who would take her into their home and provide a central place to live. She would then travel around the country – one half of the year being spent on the east coast, and the next half on the opposite side of the United States. Her great desire was to have her host at each stop in a city to arrange speeches for her. Her burning desire was to tell us, the Americans, "The Worth of Freedom." She was very afraid that we did not appreciate the gift of freedom we had received and that our indifference to world affairs could someday cause us to loose our liberty. She was staunchly opposed to the Communists. She always spoke eloquently, in total command of her subject matter, and never did I see her use a single note. She was at home whether her audience be of schoolchildren, servicemen, church groups, radio speeches and interviews, or civic clubs.

But I was planning my own escape from the POW camp back then. Amazingly, another childhood friend, William B. Shearin, from Dortches in Nash County, N.C., was also in the same camp. We had been classmates in the 4th and 5th grades. He and I had been making plans for about three weeks to escape. Our scheme was to leave by way of a hole in the wall of the basement in our barracks building. We had discovered that there was a common steam heating tunnel connecting our building with a similar building about 100 yards outside the barbed wire. We had also discovered a manhole in the tunnel halfway to the other building. Shearin and I were going to remove enough bricks by the basement heating pipe to squeeze our bodies through to the inside cavity, then make our

way along the tunnel to the manhole. Then we planned to push and pull each other out of the hole. Hopefully, the guard would be at the far end of his beat, and we could then fade into the night by quickly walking away. Having seen the area from the air previously, we thought we had a pretty good idea of the route to take to the open country.

The only thing that kept us from trying to escape earlier was the lack of food. But the point had finally arrived where each of us had managed to save, and stash in a hidden place, a few scraps of our food from the previous two weeks (very meager, but better than nothing). We were set to attempt our escape to leave immediately after bed check two nights hence, on August 25th. Fortunately, ensuing circumstances eliminated our need to escape.

On August 23, 1944, at 9:00 p.m, just two days before our planned departure deadline for escaping, Romania's King Michael made an amazing radio broadcast. Romania changed sides in the War! They started fighting the Germans and stopped fighting the English and Americans. Suddenly, Romania became allied with us against the Axis powers. In a technical sense we were immediately "free." Although the guards opened the front gate after the King's speech, I soon came closer to being killed than ever before.

In retaliation for the Romanians switching sides, the German Air Force came around daybreak the following morning and dive-bombed our prison camp. At the time, we supposed they were aiming at the city's railroad yards just a few blocks away, but missed.

When the city's air raid siren started its mournful sound, I jumped in a foxhole along with three others. One of them was Doug Morrell, who was then a combat photographer, now of Highland, Ca. This foxhole, formerly used as a guard post, measured about four-by-four feet, and was located outside a corner of the compound outside the fence. It had previously been used for one guard alone during air raids. Short minutes later a German bomb blasted our sick bay building, some 25 feet from me, and tore it up. A second bomb hit and completely destroyed a brick building some 30 feet on the opposite side of my foxhole and just outside the barbed wire, which building was being used as a maternity ward by the locals. These blasts threw dirt and debris upon us in the foxhole, covering our bodies. It became momentarily hard to see, and to regain my senses and bearing.

The blasts killed one of our men, whose name I can no longer remember, as he failed to take shelter. He was out in open ground between the two bomb blasts, going after a ripe tomato which was in a garden about four feet across a boundary fence. Only a distance of about 12 feet separated this airman from us at the moment a bomb fragment struck his head. We figured that hunger drove him to try and get this food. Just days before I had drooled from inside our compound after the same beautiful patch of ripe tomatoes, and especially this same one, located in a hospital employees yard and visible from inside our barbed wire fence.

These German bombs had "screamers" on them. That shrill screaming noise is the most deadly and defeating sound I have ever experienced. It terrifies all humans below. I knew that a bomb was falling, and it sounded like it would become a direct hit on my body! I felt positive it would hit me. I fully expected to die at any moment! To myself I said, "well, this is it! I can't escape it!" If I had not been in that foxhole I would have been killed. For years and years afterwards, every time I would hear a siren of any type I would shake and cringe. War does leave scars.

While the bombing of the camp did stop, the bombing of the City of Bucharest continued. We were free, and yet we were being attacked. Many of us thought of an unfinished multi-story office building nearby, used by the Romanians as a bomb shelter, as the best place to seek refuge Even with the air raid still in progress, some dozen of us started running towards the basement of this building about two blocks away. The guards had marched us there for mutual safety during an American air raid just a few days earlier.

As I ran toward this shelter vivid memories still remains of the wrenching sight of seeing a hotel building, some three or four stories in height, a half a block from me, receive a direct hit by a German bomb. As I dropped to the ground on a dirt path I watched the hotel explode and its pieces be blown hundreds of feet into the air, scattering all about the area. While I lay thus exposed on the open path, I was also seeking immediate protection from gunfire which began popping around us simultaneously. I had been caught in this position by the quickness and ferocity of the attack. It was too close for comfort. I just could not believe what I was experiencing. What destruction! When the bullets stopped popping we finally reached the basement shelter without further incident.

I don't know the source of the gunfire. A short row of shrubbery successfully concealed the view of any personnel to our immediate left in the direction of the firing. However, during the walk on my initial entry into the hospital camp complex, I had seen a German garrison which appeared to be headquartered just a short distance across the outer perimeter street from which the entry path began that led to our camp. The gun fire I heard may have come from some of their personnel moving about the city.

Many women and children were in the bomb shelter when we arrived. It may seem strange that we ran out of a POW camp into a crowd of "locals," but all in the building were friendly to us. From their demeanor I believe that they incorrectly thought the Americans had come immediately to their aid in Bucharest, having beaten the Russian Army into the city, and we were part of the liberating force of the American Infantry.

The Romanian authorities kept us in the shelter until the all clear signal was given. Then we headed back to the POW camp. We had nowhere else to go.

When we got to the camp we found that one of the boys had broken into the prison office storage room which contained personal items of crewmen taken at capture. Before leaving Italy we had all been given escape kits, containing about $25 in U.S. money, a very small compass, maps, and other minor things. I found in that room my own kit with my name tag and took it. Each of us took only what was marked as his. I also gathered a few personal belongings from my bunk. Among my personal effects were a few very small marble-size shallots that I had saved to eat during my planned escape preceding the bombing.

Within a few minutes I was outdoors with others walking in the open yard and headed to the front gate. I noticed a particular man who had just entered the gate, approaching me directly. By his insignia I could tell that he was a Sergeant in the German Army. To my complete amazement, he made motions like he was giving himself up to me as a prisoner! I could recognize just enough of his fractured words to get the sense of why he was "surrendering" to me. He wanted me to protect him from the Russians. He desperately wanted me to take custody of him as my prisoner, me being an American.

I declined the Sergeant's efforts, and left him as he headed to another small group of men in the yard. Presumably, he was going to continue until successful in trying to surrender to someone of us.

Forthwith, three friends and I walked out the front gate – intending to be completely separated from any chance of any other military force re-impounding us as prisoners of war in that compound. From the dim recesses of my mind my thoughts traveled quickly back to Italy to that earlier day in the war, remembering when the Italians quit the fight months after the Anzio Beach Head landings. Those American POWs then in Italian hands felt it easier to get returned to the States if they stuck together and stayed put in their camp until the American troops actually reached them. They woke up the next morning to find German soldiers had replaced their Italian captors as guards, and all those "freed" Americans were subsequently transported to Germany as its prisoners. I had remembered reading about this back in our squadron tent, and with all our crew discussing the event.

We scattered to the four corners of Bucharest. We had no leadership and no direction. We didn't know what to do or where to go. It was also a moment of euphoria with complete freedom of movement. There was peace between the Romanians and we Americans. No longer were there guns guarding us.

In our wandering, three friends and I found downtown Bucharest. This strange land had been transformed before our eyes. Real peace appeared to come to the people. As we wandered the city we even bought postcards from street vendors, using money from our re-acquired escape kits, as souvenir proof of having been to Bucharest. Many merchants had quickly reopened their shops. Today, it is hard to understand that I bought postcards during this time, but war is hard to understand. With the streets filled with friendly people that day it seemed there would be no more fighting. Unfortunately, for Romania the lull of this interlude was not to last.

As a side note, I later gave one of these postcards to Princes Catherine when she came to visit me in Fayetteville. It had a picture of the Romanian villa in the Bavarian region she and her husband had stayed in while on her honeymoon. She treasured it.

About midday we stood on the side of the main street in Bucharest and witnessed the arrival of the Russian Army as they stormed in from the Eastern Front, and paraded the city with their tanks, heavy armor, trucks and personnel. The civilians by and large welcomed the troops as the giver of freedom. Little did anyone know that in a matter of weeks the Communists would take over complete control of Romania.

The sight of the victoriously parading Russian tanks seemed quite strange to us, coming so far so fast, and being welcomed. I find it hard to describe the experience. We four GIs did not make personal contact with the Russians – afraid of the unknown as to what they would do with us. We played it safe.

While still wandering the city we met another and larger group of men from our POW camp. One gave us word that one of our ranking officers, name now forgotten, had asked him to round up as many Americans as he could find. We Americans were asked to gather at a certain time and place in the city and be transported by truck to a temporary camp outside the city, for safety and hopefully rescue. We followed instructions, found the truck, and were driven to a former Romanian Officer's training camp on the outskirts of Bucharest.

We stayed several nights. Here we were fed and housed. There were no beds. Instead, the barracks had two rows of boards about two feet above the floor running the length of the building, built like an extended box on each side of the aisle, serving as beds. The boards were on a slant, as there were no pillows. You crawled up and slept the best you could. It reminded me of a long stall at an open air market with the bottom of the stand tilted so as to better see the merchandise. This slant took the place of a pillow. The men slept side by side, elbow's apart. There was no space separating the sleeping soldiers

Upon arrival at this camp we experienced an immediate need to communicate with the Romanians in charge. I was among the earliest group of men to arrive. None of us could speak their language. Then, one said I could speak a little French. Immediately I was drafted to be the interpreter for all the troops – by then several hundred. And for some two hours or so, using my two years of high school French, I was translating and telling the others what to do, and where they were to sleep and eat. Laborious, but crudely successful. After that our regular French translator from the former compound arrived and took over the duties. I was relieved; but pleased to have somehow been of service in time of dire need.

We had no food to eat from the night before the bombing of the POW camp, until a late evening meal after arrival at the officers training center. Here, our meals were slightly better than behind the barbed wire, yet just enough per man to keep you alive. All prior

occupants of the training center had abandoned the place after the King's announcement of changing sides. Our food seemed to be already in the supply room of the center, for otherwise there was nowhere to turn to obtain provisions for nearly a thousand Americans in such short time. There were some fellow POWs who did not make it to this center from their wanderings, and days and weeks passed before their return to Italy.

Rescue came swiftly but unexpectedly on our third day. An American officer gave us word to leave camp and go to the main airport in Bucharest. An open body Ford truck with a Romanian civilian driver took my barracks group there. I don't know who arranged the transportation. At the airport we were met within hours by a fleet of B-17s sent from the 15th Air Force in Italy. P-51 fighters constantly circled overhead as protection.

A day later we learned that this rescue was the plan and work of our fellow POW Col. James A. Gunn III from Texas. This amazing story is written up in the pages of the *Congressional Record* in a speech given by Hon. Henry R. Gonzalez in the U.S. House of Representatives on May 3, 1967. It is also in the magazine *Aerospace Historian*, Autumn 1966 issue.

Col. Gunn, along with a befriended Romanian pilot, Capt.Constantine Cantacuzino (whom I also met on three occasions), stole a Romanian fighter plane. Capt. Cantacuzino, who according to the Princess had been a top Romanian flying ace in the war, helped cram Col. Gunn into the space usually used for radio equipment, with the Captain piloting the plane. They took off from Bucharest and landed in Bari, Italy. Upon their arrival, the U.S. Army brass organized the air rescue, called Operation Reunion. It is interesting reading in the Record as to "how" it all happened. Capt. Cantacuzino was a cousin of Princess Catherine and bore the same paternal family last name as the Princesses' grandparents, all Princely families.

A group of B-17s flew in for the rescue, arriving in three waves, escorted by P-51 fighters. Our sick and wounded men were evacuated first. My turn came in the third wave of arriving airplanes. The procedure went like this: a B-17 would land, cut the engine off, open the waist door, and 35 of us at the time would run out and climb aboard. To accommodate this strange weight load, it was necessary for all of us to go into the bomb bay; yes, the very place bombs were normally hung from the racks. We had to stand on small width boards that had hastily been put down to form a floor to the bays, because the

thin aluminum bomb bay doors could not support any weight. So, while standing on these bouncing, swaying boards, fearing they would crack under our collective weight, and desperately holding onto the bomb rack hardware, seeking to reduce the strain on the boards, we took off for Italy.

Once airborne, to be more comfortable, the pilot did allow us to go about the other areas of the plane. However, In order to come in for the landing we were told we had to take our original position inside the bomb bay. It took a strong stomach to stand on and over those bomb bay boards and doors, but each of us knew there was no other choice. It worked. We landed safely!

Looking back time wise, from my aging retentive memory, this was on either August 31, or September 1, 1944. Several war zone press reporters had come over with the planes, and about three of them were on the same plane to which I was assigned. When we landed at Bari, Italy, I pulled off my shoes and danced a jig at the joy of freedom and rescue. A press photographer took my picture dancing. The original is now in the federal Archives in Washington, D.C.

A few weeks later in the States, I was surprised to see this snapshot and my name published in *Newsweek* magazine, under the caption "Liberty Hoedown." *Newsweek*, p. 30, October 2, 1944. (*See* Appendix E.) The following week the identical picture was published in *Collier's* magazine. Each publication had a brief story of our rescue and return home.

At Bari we were marched to an open field, stripped of all our clothing, washed by water hose, deloused, and given new uniforms. All of our POW clothes were burned immediately with a big bonfire. After three days of debriefing at Bari, all of us were sent back to our former combat units.

My arrival back in the 99th Bomb Group and old squadron brought me the startling news that the airplane from which I had jumped *had flown back to base!* It was news hard to believe. I had seen the smoke and fire. I had been a POW with the Co-pilot, Lt. Roberts from Tulsa, Oklahoma, who told me of his getting burned while in the cockpit, and of why and how he left the plane. I had seen his bandaged burns. I just could not conceive of this airplane making it back home – but it did.

Years later Homer Wilkins told me that it took about a month working on repairs to get the plane airborne again. Then, within a week or so, while the same B-17 was circling over the field to gain altitude and join the formation for yet another mission, this same substitute "Flaming Arrow" suffered a direct collision from an American P-51 fighter plane, which had also been circling around. Both planes immediately fell from the sky, both being destroyed.

Wilkins further informed me that back on July 9th a combat photographer in another squadron took a picture of our plane being on fire, showing a long trail of smoke and flames (before Wilkins became the hero and extinguished the fire). A picture was also taken of the plane after it landed showing much of the cowling around the engine missing, along with great streaks of black smoke damage. Wilkins later gave me copies of both photographs. (*See* photos in Appendix F.) The Pilot, Lt. Henry, received the Distinguished Flying Cross award. My best recollection is that Wilkins also received the same award, plus a Silver Star.

After a couple of days at the 347th with many of our old squadron buddies, I received the word, "You are going home." So wrote Major General N. F. Twining to me at my old quarters at Tortorella on Sept. 7, 1944, in which letter he also said, "With you will go the thanks and admiration of the Fifteenth Air Force for a superb and heroic performance." (*See* Appendix G.)

After saying goodby to our old squadron mates we were flown to Naples, Italy, where we spent one night in tents at a former horse racetrack site. Some crazy soldier at the track started shooting off firecrackers around bedtime. Thinking it was someone shooting at us with a bunch of small arms fire, I immediately rolled sideways off my cot onto the grounds and tried to hide. I sincerely thought that I had survived POW camp only to be killed in my own bed in Naples. Only later, after the laughter started outside the tent did I realize what was taking place. Many of my buddies who went outside, after learning the "shooting" was only firecrackers, were ready to lynch the culprit, who somehow managed to disappear within the gathering crowd.

The next day, 13 September1944, we started home. In Naples harbor we (approximately 1,200 or slightly more of us) boarded the French ship Athos II, a converted former cargo carrier, for our trip across the Atlantic to New York harbor. The crossing of

the Mediterranean through the Strait of Gibraltar and on through the Atlantic took 13 days. We slept on hammocks strung out across the now empty cargo bays.

After a week at sea we were in a terrible afternoon storm. I remember being scared by the size of the waves. Our ship was about 480 feet long. As we tossed and rolled about the sea, I recall going up on deck out of curiosity, briefly. What I saw sent me quickly below deck. The waves were so high, by my estimation some 40 to 50 feet, that looking straight out from the deck at close range eye level one could see only the top of the wave, no sky, no horizon when we were in a trough. The floor of the wave was so large that while within the trough it would engulf the entire ship. All one could see on all sides in the roll of the ship was water. Scary!

VIII. STATESIDE TO DISCHARGE

On arriving at New York harbor on September 26, 1944 we found the weather to be unusually foggy. I had so wanted to see the Statute of Liberty as we entered, but could not find her. We docked on the New Jersey side of the harbor, secured our baggage, and in about an hour we transferred to a smaller cargo vessel converted to carry people and luggage. As we left port I was on deck, and the sun was beginning to pierce the fog. In a few minutes of traveling across the harbor in partial fog, and after having given up all hope of seeing the Statute of Liberty, the cry went up: "There it is!" And to my joy and disbelief there it was in sunshine, visible through a hole in the eerie mist of fog, that glorious Lady. A rush of sentimentality came over me; seldom have I experienced the same feeling. It was wonderful to know that collectively we had paid the price for freedom, and could now enjoy its blessings.

On crossing the Hudson, seeing the New York City skyline, and traveling up the East River and under the Brooklyn Bridge, we went to Fort Rochelle, New York. After much processing including another medical check up, all returnees were required to march in review on the main base parade field before the Brass, (the Commanders). Given our out of practice condition and general health, I think we did not present a pretty military picture.

I was at Fort Rochelle when I first saw my picture in *Newsweek* Magazine (as shown in Appendix E). My fellow airman with whom I was holding on to in the dancing was

upset that his name was not included. I think he was from some upstate town in New York. About the third day all of us were shipped out by train to the military base nearest our homes, to be processed for a 30-day furlough. This was a very nice gesture by the top officials of the Army, otherwise our furlough's would have begun the minute we left Rochelle, regardless of how long it took to arrive in our home state.

About 13 of us were from North Carolina. From Fort Rochelle we traveled into New York City at Pennsylvania Station. To go south and home, we had to transfer to Grand Central Station. As there was a time delay before our train departed we split up into small groups and saw some of the sights in Manhattan. When we left New York we were dispatched by train to Fort Bragg, N.C., by way of Washington, D.C. and the ACL Railway. My long-awaited furlough home was soon to begin.

As the southbound train stopped in Rocky Mount, N. C., my home town, on its way to Fayetteville and Fort Bragg, N. C., I got off the train for the brief rest stop as others boarded. Suddenly, and totally unplanned, my father, Walter Robert Braswell, was rushing toward me! He had by chance come down to the train station that day just to watch and hope. It was quite an embrace, with both of us crying for joy. Oh, how hard it was to have to get back on that train and continue to Bragg without first going home with my father. He was telling me to come home immediately with him right then and let mother see I was alive. Although I had telephoned my parents from New Rochelle, New York, it took seeing me at the depot for him to fully grasp that I had survived and was alive. It was a heart wrenching experience – the unexpected meeting and compulsory departure, joy, and gloom. I would have been classified as AWOL (absent without leave) and court-marshaled had I failed to report with the others to Fort Bragg.

I am happy to report that the arrival of our POW group of 13 returnees at Fort Bragg had been anticipated by the base command. A military bus was awaiting our arrival at the train station. In the next four hours we were carried to the Spring area on post, processed in, given our furlough papers, and transported back to the same train station in Fayetteville. That was fast work. As no trains were departing until many hours later in the night, and wanting to get home as soon as possible, along with my friend William Shearin we rented a taxi. The cabbie drove us the remaining 100 miles home to Rocky Mount, traveling at the war time maximum speed limit of 35 mph. We arrived around midnight.

My parents had received a telegram back in July from our U.S. Senator Josiah W. Bailey which told that I was listed by the War Department as “missing in action”! Only my phone call in mid-September from Fort Rochelle had brought them the news I was alive and back in the States, and they were very anxious to see me in person. All the while, they had not known whether I was dead or alive.

Following the 30-day furlough at home in Rocky Mount, I obeyed orders and reported to a Rest and Relaxation Camp in Miami Beach, Florida; and was there to await further assignment. After being processed on arrival in a former automobile dealership building on the famous Lincoln Road shopping district, my first living quarters were in the Traymore Hotel, which had been commandeered for Army use. Next I stayed in The Nautilus(on the Bay side), and later in The Towers Hotel (located at about 34th Street and Collins Ave). Each assignment was a wonderful contrast to the POW compound in Bucharest.

My stay in Miami Beach was from early November 1944 to about January 15, 1945. My next orders were to report for duty at Laredo, Texas, and attend Aerial Gunnery Instructors School. The Army gave me a 10-day delay in route travel arrangement. I made good use of it by going to Wilson, N.C., and getting married to Ruth Cox, my girlfriend and sweetheart since August 4, 1942.

Ruth and I were married on January 19, 1945, in the First Methodist Church in Wilson, N.C., by Rev. W. C. Ball. A small wedding with a grand total of seven people in attendance, including the preacher. There was no time for a big ceremony, and remember, our country was still at war. I wore my full uniform at my wedding.

In Raleigh, N. C. a few days later, following brief visits with our parents, Ruth and I boarded a train which eventually took us through Atlanta and New Orleans to Laredo Army Air Field in Texas, bordering Mexico on the banks of the Rio Grande. Here I completed a seven-week Gunnery Instructor’s School and became proficient in teaching. I graduated about mid-March 1945. After school hours Ruth and I were able to cross the border into Mexico on numerous occasions. On one day off we enjoyed horse back riding.

Upon leaving Laredo I was assigned to Morris Field in Charlotte, N.C. The present-day international airport at Charlotte is built upon the foundations of old Morris Field. Ruth and I lived in Charlotte on 7th Ave. I recall that it was during our Charlotte stay that we

heard the sad new that President Franklin Roosevelt had died. The military personnel and the civilians went into mourning, as did the whole country.

The shortness of my stay at Charlotte, Valdosta, and Florence is hard to explain. In part, it dealt with the War Department in Washington having sent out orders to try to assign any ex-POWs for their remaining time in the military to bases as close as possible to their hometowns. The first two of these bases had a hard time finding appropriate duties for us.

After just seven weeks of Charlotte routine duties I was transferred to the Army Air Field at Valdosta, Georgia. Ruth and I lived with a Mr. and Mrs. Millhouse at 313 Toombs Street. (Toombs happened to be the name of a Confederate General from Georgia.) Again, my duties proved to be routine.

After just three weeks of getting used to life at Valdosta we got transferred to Florence Army Air Field in South Carolina. Fortunately, Ruth and I found an apartment and were able to live there until the time for my discharge. Here, I was assigned to duty as a non-commissioned officer in the Inspector General's Department. We would go around with an Officer and a small crew to inspect anything and everything that had to do with flying training, to insure the troops were being properly taught and trained, and to see to the well being of the troops. I found out the men of the I. G.'s staff were a top notch group of people. I greatly enjoyed the experience.

Unknown to me until after I had been chosen for this work, the Captain who interviewed me upon my initial arrival and reporting for duty at base headquarters, seemed impressed with my military manner in reporting. To my credit, I had just taken a fresh bath and put on a fresh cleaned and pressed uniform. I reported at the time assigned on my orders, even though it had been only two hours after getting off the train. I gave a sharp salute, stated my name, rank, and serial number in a military manner, and responded forthrightly to all the Captain's questions, all the while standing at "attention." At last he told me to be "at ease." After a few moments he said that before I arrived it was in his mind the next soldier who reported to base for new duty he would send to fill a vacant assignment in the MP's (Military Police). But he changed his mind on my appearance and military bearing. Without saying another word he reached for his telephone and called the Inspector General's office. He told them I was the replacement

they needed for their vacant slot, and dispatched me at once to my new duties.

The war finally ended with Japan signing the peace treaty September 2, 1945. In prompt order I found out at company headquarters that I qualified for early discharge under the "point system." I was to be among the first troops to be processed. For this purpose by mid month I was shipped off to the Separation Center at Fort Bragg, N.C., for my third and final time of assignment there. On September 19, 1945, I received my Honorable Discharge. I was a civilian once again!

On this same day as I went into the ACL train station in Fayetteville to return north and home to Rocky Mount, N.C., the ticket agent told me that neither trains or busses were running because of "The Flood." The agent told me that all roads and bridges over the Cape Fear River had been closed for three days. I was temporarily stranded. The river flood waters had overspread its banks and was well over a mile wide. The flood waters reached to within one block of the Market House in downtown Fayetteville. The general area had received so much rain in prior weeks that all roads and bridges had been closed for days up and down the Cape Fear.

After hours of walking and wandering through downtown Fayetteville, visiting the USO, and then seeing for myself that the flood waters were up to Liberty Point, I returned to the station. After more long hours of waiting I was lucky enough to be at the station when the agent got word that a train had been cleared to travel north. After finally departing, we crossed the Cape Fear River bridge. I remember vividly that the water was still so high as to be covering the cross ties of the tracks; only the iron rails were visible! I was so apprehensive that the train would safely get across the flood waters that while crossing I stood with the conductor, somewhat nervous himself, on the open platform at the rear of the last coach car. The iron rails were some forty five to fifty feet above the river bottom. The surface appeared to be an ocean of water. We proceeded across at a snails pace.

We did make it on to Rocky Mount successfully. It was a happy time being with my family again. The war was over!

IX. DECORATIONS AND AWARDS

For my military service I have been awarded the following decorations:

★ Air Medal, 7 May 1944, and subsequently with 3 oak leaf clusters:

(1) 26 May 1944,

(2) 13 July1944, and

(3) 5 September 1944, for shooting down a German fighter, an FW-190.

★ Purple Heart, 5 May 1944.

★ Presidential Unit Citation, 22 October 1944, for excellence in unit performance in raid on Weiner Nuestadt, Austria on 23 April 1944.

★ European Theater of Operations Ribbon, with six Bronze Service Stars:

(1) Air Offensive Europe Campaign, date of award 3 July 1944. (The official service inclusive dates are: 4 July 1942 - 5 June 1944.)

(2) Southern France Campaign, 18 October 1944. (Our raids were made in May and June 1944.)

(3) Air Combat Balkins Campaign, 19 April 1945. (The official, inclusive dates are: 1 November 1943 - 31 December 1944.)

(4) Northern France Campaign 21 April 1945. (The official, inclusive dates are: 25 July 1944 -14 September 1944.)

(5) Normandy Campaign, 26 May 1945. (The official, inclusive dates are: 6 June 1944 - 24 July 1944.)

(6) Rome-Arno Campaign,1944. (The official, inclusive dates are: 22 January 1944 - September 1944.)

★ Good Conduct Medal, Rapid City, S.D., 1943.

★ Additional awards included:

(1) the Silver Wings of a Tail Gunner as an Aerial Crew Member, in Rapid City, South Dakota in 1943;

(2) the pin of the Caterpillar Club from the Switlick Parachute Co., issued 3-26-45 for my life saving parachute jump (remember, “silk worm’s” made silk for parachutes), on 7-9-44; and

(3) the POW Medal, which was awarded 25 July 1988, # R9046597.

Two documents listed in the appendices, plus a third on the reverse side of my Honorable Discharge document, reflect the basic authority for these awards. First, a "Certificate" from the Army signed by Howard H. Heady, Capt., Air Corps, Adjutant, 31 August 1945, from the office of the Squadron Commander of the 347th Bomb Squadron, 99th Bomb Group (HV) Army Air Forces, APO 420, U.S. Army. (*See* Appendix I.)

The second document is my Permanent Class "A" Pass from Florence Air Base, South Carolina, which pass I used in the summer and early fall of 1945. The date of Capt. Dull's signature, shown as December 1, 1945, is the date when his officer's commission expired (comparable to a Notary Public's commission expiration date). Under "Authorized Decorations" on the Pass the Good Conduct Medal is listed as awarded in 1943. This was awarded in Rapid City, South Dakota. I believe the correct date is 12-29-43. The Purple Heart date on the Pass of 12-29-43 is incorrect. The correct date is 5 May 1944, and it was awarded in Torterella, Italy. (*See* Appendix J.)

My Normandy Campaign Battle Star is left off the Class A Pass list. I remember the Squadron First Sgt. typing the information on the Pass and complaining that I had too many awards to put on such a small space. My Rome-Arno Battle Star is left off Capt. Heady's list, perhaps because the closing date for its eligibility had not been reached when he dated his letter. However, I was qualified earlier by its inclusive starting date, and it is on my Honorable Discharge.

The third source, the form on the reverse side of my Honorable Discharge, dated 19 September 1945, does include all of the several awards listed above. (*See* Appendix K.) My discharge papers are recorded in the Wilson County Courthouse, Wilson, N.C. in the Register of Deeds office in Book II Discharges, pp. 225-226, on 24 September 1945.

X. ADDENDUM

During the war I traveled on four continents: North America, South America, Europe, and Africa. I was on the ground in eight foreign countries, and flew over many more. In 35 months of military service, I was physically at 33 different military bases. My longest stay was four months nine days at Tortorella, Italy. My shortest stay was four hours at Fort Bragg, N.C.

Three times I was carried on my squadron roll as being MIA–Missing In Action--April 30, 1944 (crash mission # 22, Varese, Italy); May 25, 1944 (incomplete mission to Lyons, France with emergency landing near Naples, Italy), and July 9, 1944 (final mission # 41 to Ploesti, Romania), which status was later changed to that of POW.

I had 189:15 hours of total recorded combat flying time, all in a B-17. (*See* list of Combat Missions in Appendix H.) I was unable to find a record of my flying training air time, or time spent flying overseas through South America and Africa; nor my total air time in aborted mission flying from Tortorello, Italy. My best recall of training flight time is 400 hour 30 minutes. Once in Tortorello I saw a squadron office entry that showed a total of all flying time as 600 hours and 30 minutes up to that given date. I happen to be one of those former soldiers whose original military records were all destroyed by a fire in the Army's main storage facility in St. Louis, Missouri, many years after the war ended.

Of my original combat crew of 10 men only one was uninjured during combat: Lt. Fred Henry of Ohio, our original Co-pilot. He and Robert Maslow of New York City, our Pilot, were the only crew members to complete the required 50 missions. Capt. Maslow (yes, he had received a promotion) was the last man from our crew to leave Italy. Because of his knee injury on our 21st mission, he missed out on many missions with the original crew, but helped the squadron in other operational ways. Ruth and I had a happy reunion with him in New York City in August 1984, while attending a seminar for state appellate court judges at New York University in Greenwich Village.

☆ ☆ ☆ ☆ ☆

A family member preceded me in the status of POW. My grandfather Alexander Denson, then of Nash County, N.C., was in the Civil War. After participating in the famous battle at Gettysburg, he was captured in the Confederate retreat by the Yankees at Kelly's Ford, Virginia on November 7, 1863, and was a POW at Point Lookout, Maryland until exchanged at Aiken's Landing, James River, Va, on Feb. 23-March 3, 1865. He was a member of the 30th N.C. Regiment, Company I ("eye"), Infantry, which later was attached to the Army of Northern Virginia for the Gettysburg campaign. He was the father of my mother, Ella Denson Braswell.

A few years ago, this historical information was verified for me by discovering in my storage at home among my personal papers a 9th grade English theme paper I had written about my grandfather in the spring of 1938. In the theme I had used facts then supplied by my mother's memory of conversations with her father. All of mother's facts matched completely with information supplied to me from the research of my cousin, Kelly Turner of Weldon, N.C., related on mother's side. In a letter of March 1, 1995, Kelly sent me copies of pages from a book about the Civil War, called: *North Carolina Troops, 1861-1865.* I think the author was Walter Clark.

A paragraph about Alexander Denson is listed on page 404. Other data about the history of Company I ("eye"), and his regiment can be found on page 401. His units participation at Gettysburg can be found on pages 318--319. There are numerous references to the activities of the *30th* from pages 314-321, and at bottom of page 321 is recorded the subsequent surrender of his regiment as a part of the Army of Northern Virginia to the Yankees.

My life's experiences and bountiful blessings cause me to want to share with each reader select words from two songs as found in "The Methodist Hymnal." The first stanza below is taken from the third verse of "For The Healing Of The Nations," No. 428, with words by Fred Kean in 1968. The second stanza is from the first verse of "Behold A Broken World," No. 426, with words by Timothy Dudley-Smith in 1985.

All that kills abundant living,
let it from the earth be banned;
pride of status, race or schooling,
dogmas that obscure your plan.
In our common quest for justice
may we hallow life's brief span.

* * * * *

Behold a broken world, we pray,
where want and war increase,
And grant us Lord, in this our day,
the ancient dream of Peace!

The End

APPENDIX A

Photo of Edwin Maurice Braswell's Original B-17 Air Crew Members. Taken December 14,1943, at Rapid City, South Dakota.

Front row (kneeling) from left to right: (1) Norman R. Bolotin, Radio Operator; (2) William C. Esterbrook, Navigator; (3) Robert Maslow, Pilot; (4) Fred Henry, Co-pilot; (5) Andy Lazar, Bombardier.

Back row (standing) left to right: (6) Milton Hyman, Ball Turret Gunner; (7) Homer J. Wilkins, Top Turret Gunner and Chief Engineer; (8) Edwin Maurice Braswell, Tail Gunner (author); (9) Keith L. Craig, Waist Gunner; and (10) Richard E. Holt, Waist Gunner.

"*We bonded as friends and airmen; I was not afraid to fly anywhere with these guys*."

This picture shows our B-17 on its belly with bent propellers and other destruction. This photo was taken by a combat photographer after our plane returned home from one of our aborted raids. (I can't recall the date because we were given no credit for the mission.) We had received such extensive structural damage from flak during a previous mission, that excessive structural vibrations in flight caused us to return to base. As we were taxiing from the runway to our revetment, the left landing gear strut collapsed, and we plowed along the ground. This plane was put out of commission about two to three weeks. Although we were all shaken up, none of us had serious injuries. The men in the picture are some our fliers and of the ground crew.

APPENDIX C

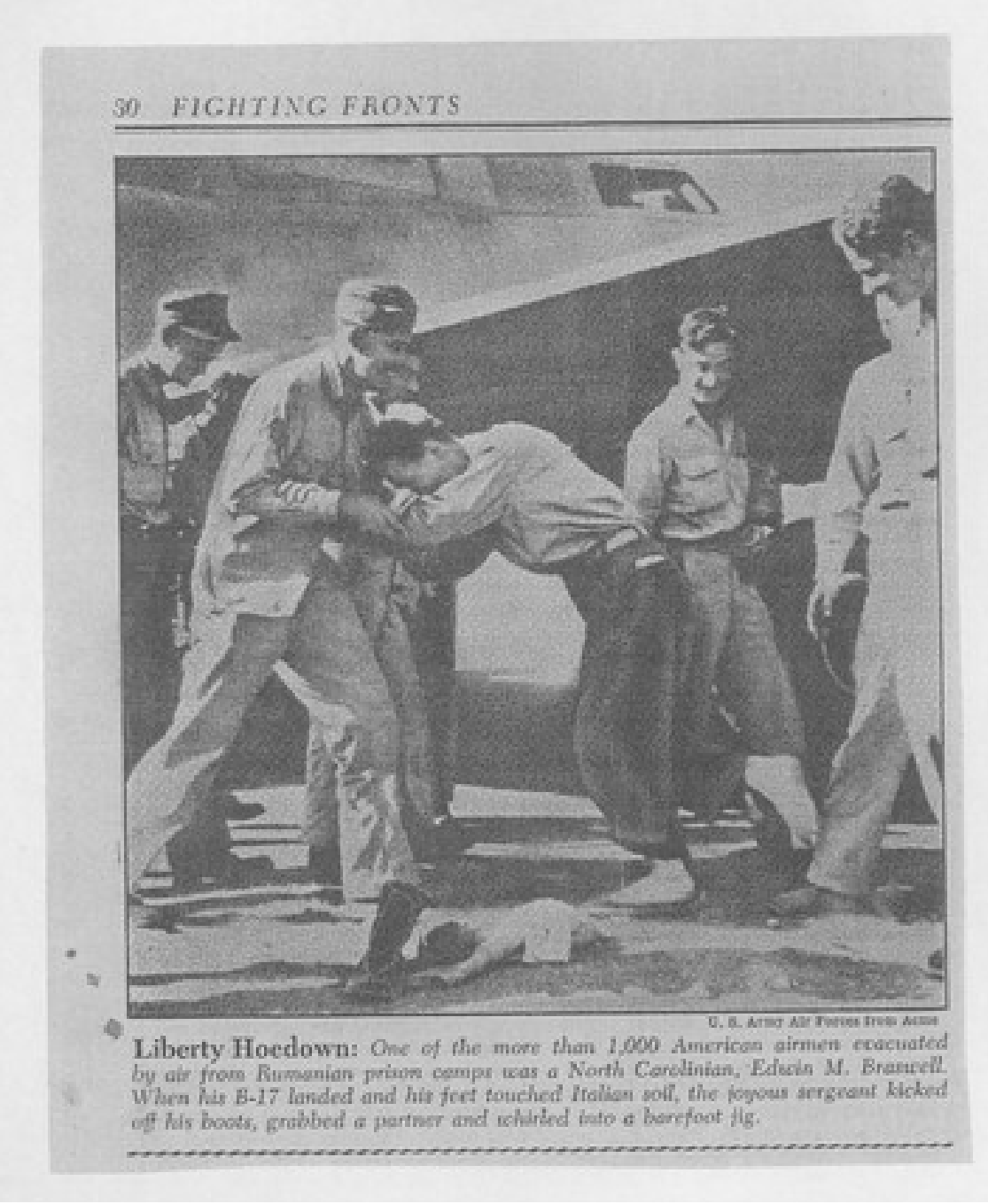
Photos of the original Flaming Arrow after it crash-landed on April 30, 1944, on Varese, Italy raid. The left wing was severed and separated about 69 feet from the fuselage. The tail section was twisted many degrees off center from the cockpit. The intense fire consumed the bulk of the remainder of the B-17. All 11 persons (including a combat photographer) on board survived, with seven receiving the Purple Heart for their injuries.

APPENDIX D

Photo showing Edwin Maurice Braswell holding spent ammunition casings that exploded around him on July 6, 1944, during Mission # 38, as well as part of the tail section of his B-17 showing some of the 47 holes received by flak on that mission.
The entire tail section had to be replaced because of the total structural damage.

APPENDIX E

"Liberty Hoedown" photo published in *Newsweek* magazine on October 2, 1944, p. 30. Braswell is the one with bare feet on the right. The other person on the left he is holding was from New York state.



30 FIGHTING FRONTS

U. S. Army Air Forces from Acme

Liberty Hoedown: *One of the more than 1,000 American airmen evacuated by air from Rumanian prison camps was a North Carolinian, Edwin M. Braswell. When his B-17 landed and his feet touched Italian soil, the joyous sergeant kicked off his boots, grabbed a partner and whirled into a barefoot jig.*

APPENDIX F

Photos of our B-17 on way to Polesti Oil Fields. This was the plane that had replaced the first Flaming Arrow. Photos were taken by a combat photographer during and after Mission # 41.

Top: #2 engine on fire during flight, showing parachutes on right and left sides. (Edwin Maurice Braswell was among those 7 parachuting.) Photos given to me by Wilkins after war was over.

Below: closeup of burned-out engine of same plane after landing.
(left to right: Wilkins, Peddycord, unknown radio operator, and Henry).

Letter from Major General N. F. Twining, USA Commanding, Fifteenth Air Force, dated 7 September 1944.

FIFTEENTH AIR FORCE
Office of the Commanding General
A. P. O. 520

7 September 1944

Staff Sergeant Edwin M. Braswell
Hq. Fifteenth Air Force
APO 520, U. S. Army.

Dear Sergeant Braswell:

You are going home. With you will go the thanks and admiration of the Fifteenth Air Force for a superb and heroic performance. You are the returning heroes of the Battle of Ploesti. You will be greeted and treated as such by your loved ones, and by a grateful American public. They are proud of you.

Your safe return to my command marked the culmination of an outstanding campaign in the annals of American military history. The German war machines' disintegration on all fronts is being caused, to a large extent, by their lack of oil - oil that you took from them.

I have only one regret on this jubilant occasion. I wish it had been possible to bring out of Roumania every officer and man who went down in that battle. Unfortunately there are some who will never return. The memory of their sacrifice is an inspiration to the all of us.

One of the memories of my life will be the thrill I experienced as the B-17's came into view, circled, landed, and I saw you unloading. It was impossible for me to greet each of you and it will be impossible for me to say "Good-bye" to each of you before you return to the States. However, I do want you to know my thoughts and those of your fellow soldiers are with you.

Best of luck and Godspeed.

N. F. TWINING
Major General, USA
Commanding

Official Record of Combat Missions of Staff Sgt. Edwin M. Braswell, 347th Bomb Squadron, 99th Bomb Group

.

COMBAT MISSIONS OF S/SGT EDWIN M BRASWELL
347th BOMB SQUADRON (Hv)
99th BOMB GROUP

TARGET	DATE	HOURS	MISSIONS
Steyr, Austria(Germany)	April 2, 1944	7:05	1 & 2
Budapest, Hungary	April 3, 1944	6:25	3 & 4
Bucharest, Rumania	April 4, 1944	7:35	5 & 6
Ploesti, Rumania	April 5, 1944	7:30	7 & 8
Treviso, Italy	April 7, 1944	5:10	9
Fischamend Market, Austria	April 12, 1944	6:20	10 & 11
Gyor, Hungary	April 13, 1944	6:00	12 & 13
Ploesti, Rumania	April 15, 1944	7:45	14 & 15
Belgrade, Yugoslavia	April 17, 1944	5:40	16
Venice, Italy	April 20, 1944	5:35	17
Weiner Neustadt, Austria	April 23, 1944	6:15	18 & 19
Piombino, Italy	April 28, 1944	5:10	20
Toulon, France	April 29, 1944	7:45	21
Varese, Italy	April 30, 1944	6:30	22
Lyons, France	May 25, 1944	(2:40 Operational time Only)	23
Avignon, France	May 27, 1944	8:00	24 & 25
Debreczen, Hungary	June 2, 1944	7:00	26
Galati, Rumania	June 6, 1944	6:30	27 & 28
Focsani, Rumania	June 11, 1944	7:00	29 & 30
Ploesti, Rumania	June 23, 1944	7:25	31
Sete, France	June 25, 1944	8:00	32
Brod, Yugoslavia	June 27, 1944	6:50	33
Budapest, Hungary	June 30, 1944	6:45	34
Vinkovci, Yugoslavia	July 2, 1944	7:00	35 & 36
Brasov, Rumania	July 4, 1944	7:00	37
Montpellier, France	July 5, 1944	8:30	38
Bergamo, Italy	July 6, 1944	6:20	39&40
Blechammer, Germany	July 7, 1944	8:10	41
Ploesti, Rumania	July 9, 1944	5:20	
		189:15 Total	

Certificate of official records of Staff Sgt. Edwin M. Braswell, dated 31 August 1945.

THREE HUNDRED FORTY SEVENTH BOMBARDMENT SQUADRON
NINETY NINTH BOMBARDMENT GROUP (HV) ARMY AIR FORCES
Office of the Squadron Commander

APO 520, U.S. Army

31 August 1945

C E R T I F I C A T E

I, HOWARD H. HEADY, Capt., Air Corps, Adjutant, Three Hundred Forty Seventh Bombardment Squadron (HV) AAF, do hereby certify as follows,

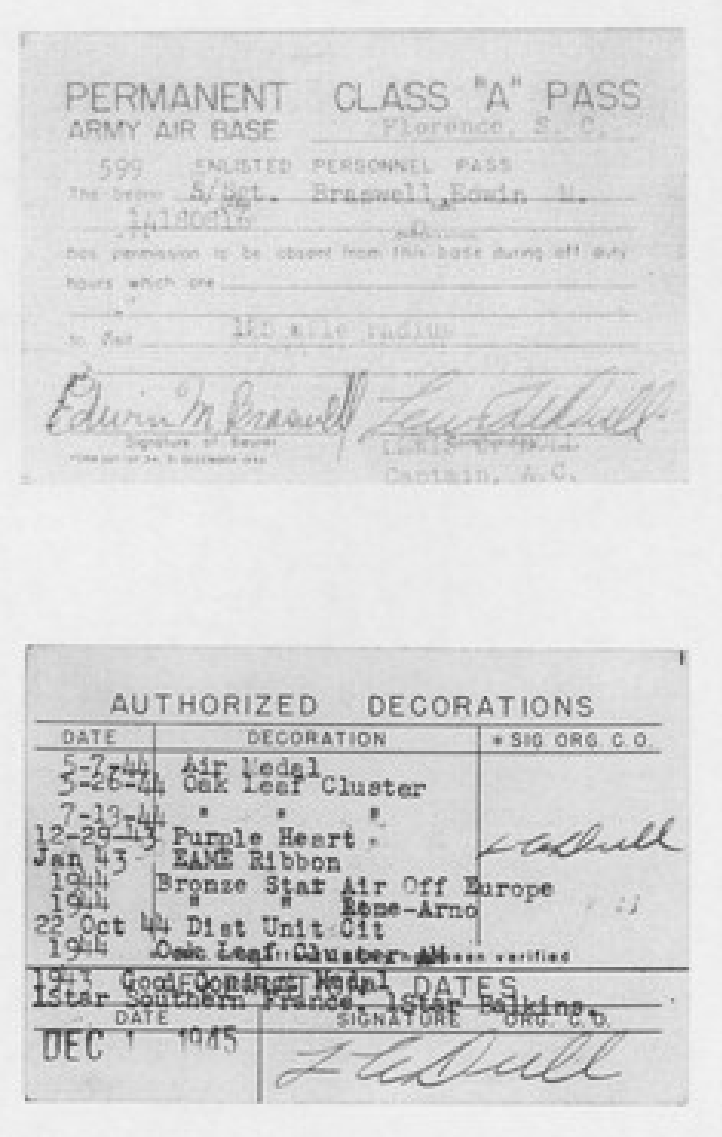
I am the official custodian in charge of all records pertaining to personnel of this squadron.

I further certify that the official records of this squadron indicate that S/Sgt. Edwin M. Braswell ASN 14180816 is entitled to the following awards and decorations pursuant to the authority indicated

AWARDS	AUTHORITY
EAME Ribbon.	WD Cir # 1, dtd 1 January 1943.
Battle Star, Air Offensive Europe	ETOUSA Ltr, dtd 3 Jul 1944
Battle Star, So. France Camp.	NATOUSA Ltr, dtd 18 Oct 1944
Battle Star, Air Combat Balkans Camp.	MTOUSA Ltr, dtd 19 Apr 1945
Battle Star, No. France Camp.	ETOUSA Ltr, dtd 21 Apr 1945
Battle Star, Normandy Camp.	5th Ind Hq ETOUSA 26 May 45 to Ltr Hq 99th Bomb Gp Sub: Battle Participation Awards dtd 12 May 45.
Purple Heart	GO #22, Hq 99th B.Gp, dtd 5 May 44
Air Medal	GO #377, Hq 15th AF, dtd 7 May 44
1st O.L.C. to Air Medal	GO #655, Hq 15th AF, dtd 26 May 44
2d O.L.C. to Air Medal	GO #1821, Hq 15th AF, dtd 13 Jul 44
3rd O.L.C. to Air Medal	GO #3120, Hq 15th AF, dtd 5 Sep 44
(For one (1) Enemy Aircraft destroyed--FW-190, on 30 April 1944)	

HOWARD H. HEADY,
Capt., Air Corps,
Adjutant.

The front and back of the Permanent Class “A” Pass of Edwin Maurice Braswell.



PERMANENT CLASS "A" PASS
ARMY AIR BASE Florence, S. C.

599 ENLISTED PERSONNEL PASS

The bearer S/Sgt. Braswell, Edwin M.

has permission to be absent from this base during off duty hours which are

to Rad 150 mile radius

Edwin M Braswell
Signature of bearer

Lewis Caldwell
Lewis Caldwell, Jr.
Captain, A.C.

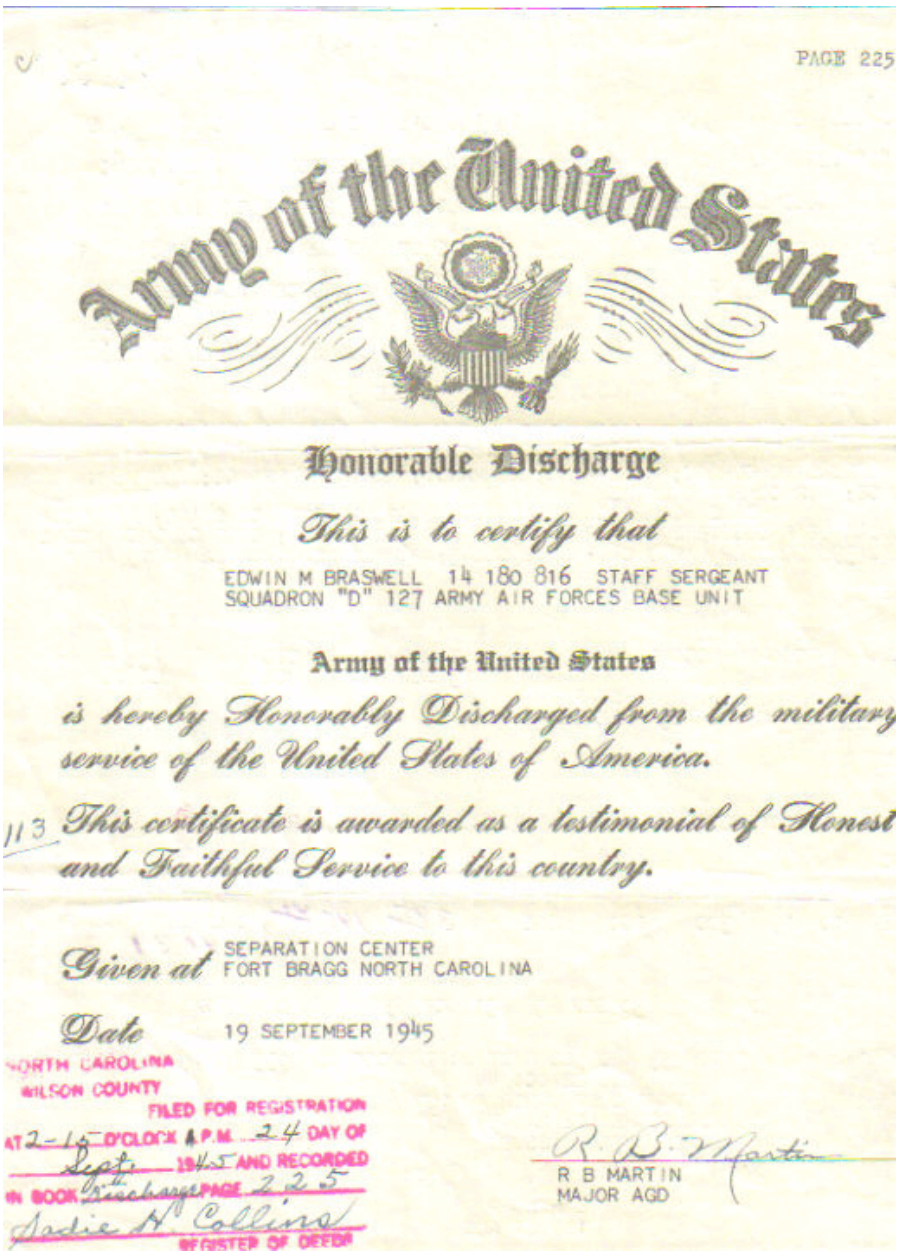
AUTHORIZED DECORATIONS

DATE	DECORATION	* SIG ORG C.O.
5-7-44	Air Medal	
5-26-44	Oak Leaf Cluster	
7-13-44	" " "	
12-29-43	Purple Heart	
Jan 43	EAME Ribbon	
1944	Bronze Star Air Off Europe	
1944	" " Rome-Arno	
22 Oct 44	Dist Unit Cit	
1944	Oak Leaf Cluster	

1943 Good Conduct Medal DATES
1Star Southern France, 1Star Rhine.

DATE	SIGNATURE	ORG. C.O.
DEC 1 1945	L Caldwell	

The front and back of the Honorable Discharge of Edwin Maurice Braswell dated September 19, 1945.



PAGE 225

Army of the United States

Honorable Discharge

This is to certify that

EDWIN M BRASWELL 14 180 816 STAFF SERGEANT
SQUADRON "D" 127 ARMY AIR FORCES BASE UNIT

Army of the United States

is hereby Honorably Discharged from the military service of the United States of America.

113 *This certificate is awarded as a testimonial of Honest and Faithful Service to this country.*

Given at SEPARATION CENTER
FORT BRAGG NORTH CAROLINA

Date 19 SEPTEMBER 1945

R. B. Martin
R B MARTIN
MAJOR AGD

NORTH CAROLINA
WILSON COUNTY
FILED FOR REGISTRATION
AT 2-15 O'CLOCK P.M. 24 DAY OF
Sept 1945 AND RECORDED
IN BOOK Discharge PAGE 225
Sadie H Collins
REGISTER OF DEEDS

PAGE 226

ENLISTED RECORD AND REPORT OF SEPARATION
HONORABLE DISCHARGE

1. LAST NAME - FIRST NAME - MIDDLE INITIAL: BRASWELL EDWIN M
2. ARMY SERIAL NO.: 14 180 816
3. GRADE: S SGT
4. ARM OR SERVICE: AC
5. COMPONENT: AUS
6. ORGANIZATION: SQ "D" 127TH AAF BU
7. DATE OF SEPARATION: 19 SEP 45
8. PLACE OF SEPARATION: SEPARATION CENTER FORT BRAGG NC
9. PERMANENT ADDRESS FOR MAILING PURPOSES: 208 MARIGOLD ST ROCKY MOUNT NC EDGECOMBE CO
10. DATE OF BIRTH: 16 DEC 1922
11. PLACE OF BIRTH: ROCKY MOUNT NC
12. ADDRESS FROM WHICH EMPLOYMENT WILL BE SOUGHT: SEE 9
13. COLOR EYES: BLUE
14. COLOR HAIR: BROWN
15. HEIGHT: 6-0
16. WEIGHT: 158 LBS.
17. NO. DEPEND.: 1
18. RACE: WHITE X
19. MARITAL STATUS: MARRIED X
20. U.S. CITIZEN: YES X
21. CIVILIAN OCCUPATION AND NO.: RADIO ANNOUNCER (0-69.21)

MILITARY HISTORY

22. DATE OF INDUCTION:
23. DATE OF ENLISTMENT: 31 OCT 42
24. DATE OF ENTRY INTO ACTIVE SERVICE: 31 OCT 42
25. PLACE OF ENTRY INTO SERVICE: SEYMOUR JOHNSON FLD GOLDSBORO NC
SELECTIVE SERVICE DATA: 26. REGISTERED: YES X; 27. LOCAL S.S. BOARD NO.: 1; 28. COUNTY AND STATE: WILSON CO NC
29. HOME ADDRESS AT TIME OF ENTRY INTO SERVICE: WILSON CO SEE 9
30. MILITARY OCCUPATIONAL SPECIALTY AND NO.: AAF GUNNERY INSTRUCTOR (938)
31. MILITARY QUALIFICATION AND DATE (i.e., infantry, aviation and marksmanship badges, etc.): MM.45 PISTOL 10 NOV 43
32. BATTLES AND CAMPAIGNS: AIR OFFENSIVE EUROPE; ROME-ARNO; NORMANDY; NORTHERN FRANCE; SOUTHERN FRANCE; AIR COMBAT BALKINS
33. DECORATIONS AND CITATIONS: EAMET CAMPAIGN MEDAL WITH 6 BRONZE SERVICE STARS; AIR MEDAL W/3 OAK LEAF CLUSTERS GO#377 HQ 15 AF APO 520 7MAY44; GOOD CONDUCT MEDAL GO HQ 398 BOMB GP RAPID CITY SD 29DEC43; PURPLE HEART GO#22 HQ 15 AF *
34. WOUNDS RECEIVED IN ACTION: EAMET

35. LATEST IMMUNIZATION DATES

SMALLPOX	TYPHOID	TETANUS	OTHER (specify)
9NOV44	NO RECORD	NO RECORD	NONE

36. SERVICE OUTSIDE CONTINENTAL U.S. AND RETURN

DATE OF DEPARTURE	DESTINATION	DATE OF ARRIVAL
2 MAR 44	ETO	13 MAR 44
13 SEP 44	USA	26 SEP 44

37. TOTAL LENGTH OF SERVICE

CONTINENTAL SERVICE YEARS	MONTHS	DAYS	FOREIGN SERVICE YEARS	MONTHS	DAYS
2	3	24	0	6	25

38. HIGHEST GRADE HELD: STAFF SERGEANT

113
a

39. PRIOR SERVICE: NONE

ON DISCHARGE, I CERTIFY ... ELIGIBILITY NO. 7222 6 NC WAS ISSUED BY THE VETERANS ADMINISTRATION TO BE USED FOR THE FUTURE REQUEST OF ANY GUARANTY OR INSURANCE BENEFIT UNDER TITLE III OF THE SERVICEMEN'S READJUSTMENT ACT OF 1944, AS AMENDED, THAT MAY BE AVAILABLE TO THE PERSON ...

40. REASON AND AUTHORITY FOR SEPARATION: CONVENIENCE OF GOVERNMENT RR 1-1 (DEMOBILIZATION) AR 615-365 15 DEC 44
41. SERVICE SCHOOLS ATTENDED: NONE
42. EDUCATION (Years): Grammar 7; High School 5; College 0

PAY DATA

43. LONGEVITY FOR PAY PURPOSES: YEARS 2; MONTHS 10; DAYS 19
44. MUSTERING OUT PAY: TOTAL $ 300; THIS PAYMENT $ 100
45. SOLDIERS DEPOSITS: NONE
46. TRAVEL PAY: $ 3.95
47. TOTAL AMOUNT, NAME OF DISBURSING OFFICER: 145.97 A CALPESTRI MAJ FD
VOU NO 4039

INSURANCE NOTICE

IMPORTANT: IF PREMIUM IS NOT PAID WHEN DUE OR WITHIN THIRTY-ONE DAYS THEREAFTER, INSURANCE WILL LAPSE. MAKE CHECKS OR MONEY ORDERS PAYABLE TO THE TREASURER OF THE U. S. AND FORWARD TO COLLECTIONS SUBDIVISION, VETERANS ADMINISTRATION, WASHINGTON 25, D. C.

48. KIND OF INSURANCE	49. HOW PAID	50. Effective Date of Allotment Discontinuance	51. Date of Next Premium Due (One month after 50)	52. PREMIUM DUE EACH MONTH	53. INTENTION OF VETERAN TO
Nat. Serv. X	Allotment X	30 SEP 45	31 OCT 45	$6.50	Continue X

55. REMARKS (This space for completion of above items or entry of other items specified in W. D. Directives)
*ITEM 33 APO 520 DIST UNIT BADGE GO 4095 HQ 15TH AF APO 520 22 OCT 44
NO TIME LOST UNDER AW 107
ASR SCORE (12 MAY45) 87
LAPEL BUTTON ISSUED

54. RIGHT THUMB PRINT

56. SIGNATURE OF PERSON BEING SEPARATED: Edwin M Braswell
57. PERSONNEL OFFICER (Type name, grade and organization - signature): E M KOPP 1ST LT AUS E M Kopp

WFL

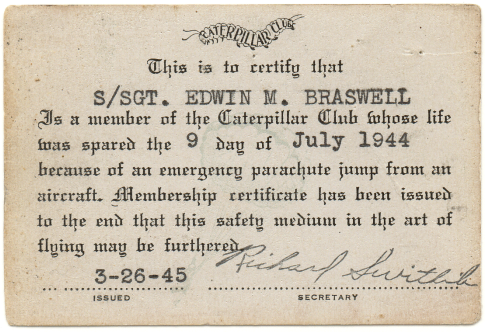
WD AGO FORM 53-55
1 November 1944

This form supersedes all previous editions of WD AGO Forms 53 and 55 for enlisted persons entitled to an Honorable Discharge, which will not be used after receipt of this revision.

APPENDIX L

Top: Membership card for the Caterpillar Club issued on March 26, 1945, for emergency parachute jump on July 9, 1944.

Bottom: Photo taken in 1943 in Ephrata, Washington, in the barracks area after returning from a practice mission. The building was a hut, small and square, only large enough to house a crew's six enlisted men. We were listed as crew #125 and in barrack #289.


CATERPILLAR CLUB

This is to certify that

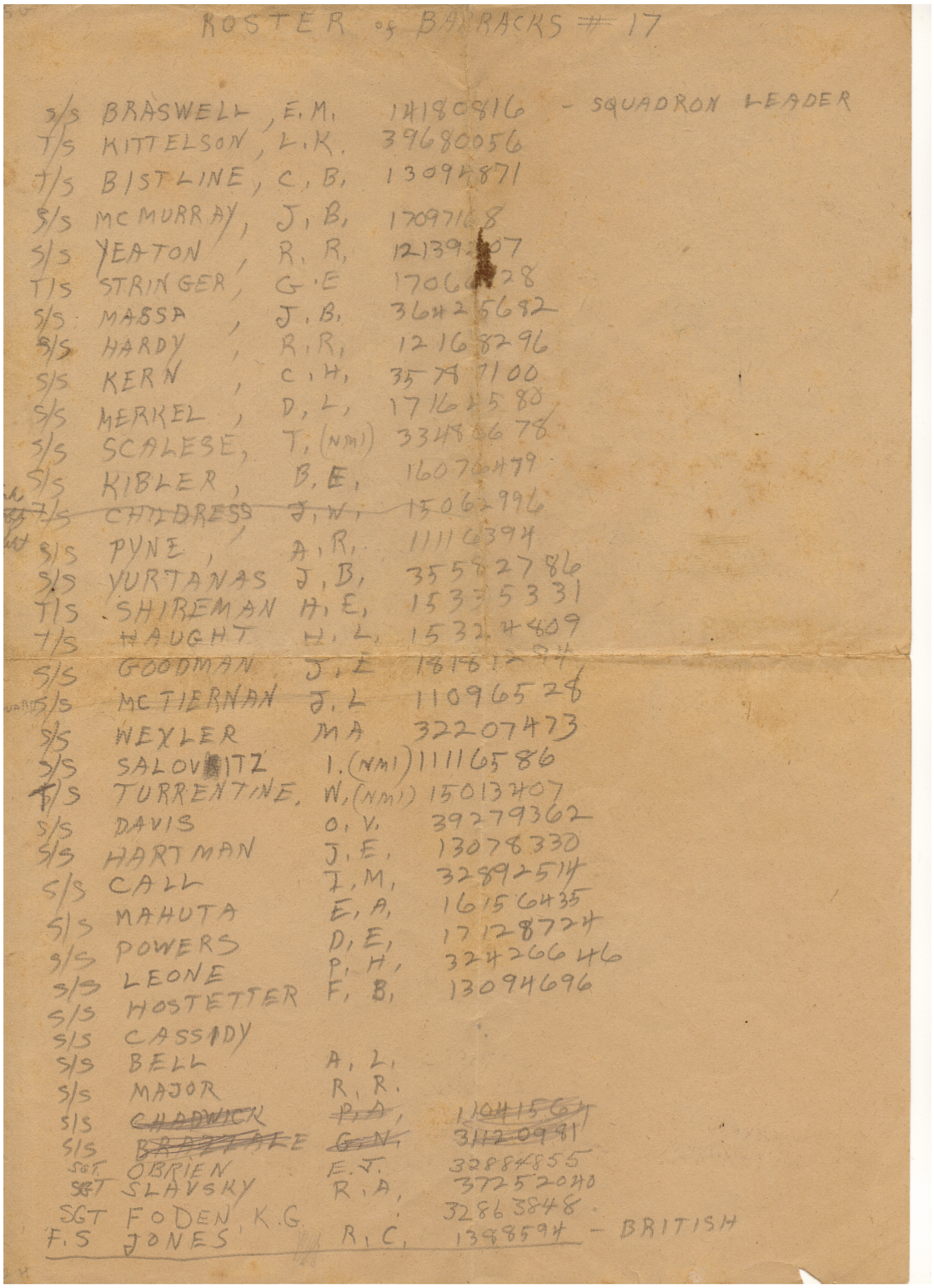
S/SGT. EDWIN M. BRASWELL

Is a member of the Caterpillar Club whose life was spared the 9 day of July 1944 because of an emergency parachute jump from an aircraft. Membership certificate has been issued to the end that this safety medium in the art of flying may be furthered.

3-26-45 ISSUED

Richard Smith SECRETARY

Two-page roster of names of POWs in Barracks #17, 2nd floor, left side of H -shaped brick building. Bunks were double stacked in open bays. List written by Edwin Braswell in August 1944.



ROSTER of BARRACKS # 17

S/S BRASWELL, E.M. 14180816 - SQUADRON LEADER
T/S KITTELSON, L.K. 39680056
T/S BISTLINE, C.B. 13094871
S/S MCMURRAY, J.B. 17097168
S/S YEATON, R.R. 12139207
T/S STRINGER, G.E 17066128
S/S MASSA, J.B. 36425682
S/S HARDY, R.R. 12168296
S/S KERN, C.H. 35[illegible]7100
S/S MERKEL, D.L. 17162580
S/S SCALESE, T. (NMI) 33486678
S/S KIBLER, B.E. 16076479
~~T/S CHILDRESS J.W.~~ 15062996
S/S PYNE, A.R. 11116394
S/S YURTANAS J.B. 35582786
T/S SHIREMAN H.E. 15335331
T/S HAUGHT H.L. 15324409
S/S GOODMAN J.E 18161284
S/S MCTIERNAN J.L 11096528
S/S WEXLER MA 32207473
S/S SALOVITZ I. (NMI) 11116586
~~T~~/S TURRENTINE, W. (NMI) 15013707
S/S DAVIS O.V. 39279362
S/S HARTMAN J.E. 13078330
S/S CALL T.M. 32892514
S/S MAHUTA E.A. 16156435
S/S POWERS D.E. 17128724
S/S LEONE P.H. 32426646
S/S HOSTETTER F.B. 13094696
S/S CASSIDY
S/S BELL A.L.
S/S MAJOR R.R.
S/S ~~CHADWICK~~ ~~P.A.~~ ~~11041567~~
S/S ~~BRADSHAW~~ ~~G.N.~~ 31120981
SGT OBRIEN E.J. 32884855
SGT SLAVSKY R.A. 37252040
SGT FODEN K.G. 32863848
F.S JONES R.C. 1398594 - BRITISH

S/S HANKINS I.M. 32418752
S/S SCARBOROUGH B.A. 1716 5508
T/S LOZINSKI J.J.
T/S CAMILLO, C.H. 13098240
SGT HAWKINS, C.S. 15112640
SGT TIMON, I.L. 13771497
F/S. GODFREY, P.E. 798617 - BRITISH
F/S BEEVOR, P.S. 1801199 - BRITISH
SGT, SAMBROOK, D.(NMI) 1884607 - BRITISH
F/S. PARSONS, F.W. 6[illegible]807 - BRITISH
S/S. WEAVER, A.T.
S/S, DIMINNO, A.J. 31281196
S/S KIBLER, B.E. 16076479
SGT. MILSON, J.CH. 1622363 - BRITISH
T/S ATRINSON J.
S/S LAWLESS E.N. 17127701
S/S WADE R.L. 35345820
SGT LITTLE F.P. 16113932
S/S [redacted] YAUS W.H. 12091262
S/S [redacted] R.W. 16113337
S/S GRIFFITH K.(NMI) 16055084
F/S CORMIE G.(NMI) 1540679 - BRITISH
F/S WHITE R.M.A. 1493133 - BRITISH
S/S VALLA J.E. 32456805
S/S SCOTT G.H. 32270340
T/S ENGLE F.
SGT PHILBORN
S/S TULL J.
T/S TONG

G. GUARD

5.8